

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2010
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L.A.youth

the newspaper by and about teens

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DAD,
PLEASE STOP SMOKING

I'VE TRIED
TO GET HIM
TO QUIT BUT
HE WON'T
LISTEN TO ME
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L.A.youth

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FOR PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

About L.A. Youth

How L.A. Youth started

Former teacher Donna Myrow founded the nonprofit teen newspaper in 1988 after the Supreme Court Hazelwood decision, which struck down student press rights. Myrow saw a need for an independent, uncensored forum for youth expression. L.A. Youth is now celebrating its 22nd year of publishing.

How L.A. Youth is doing today

L.A. Youth now has a readership of 350,000 in Los Angeles County. Hundreds of students have benefited from L.A. Youth's journalism training. Many have graduated from college and have built on their experiences at L.A. Youth to pursue careers in media, teaching and other fields. Our Foster Youth Writing Project has brought the stories of teens in foster care into the newspaper. For more info, see layout.com.

How L.A. Youth is funded

L.A. Youth is a nonprofit charitable organization funded by donations from foundations, corporations and individuals.

L.A. Youth's mission

L.A. Youth is a leading advocacy voice for teens through journalism, literacy and civic engagement. We use media as a tool for young people to examine themselves, their communities and the world at large.

Advocating for teens

Do you like what we do and want to support us? Go to why.layout.com, our blog written by L.A. Youth's adult staff, to learn more about the issues L.A. Youth cares about. You can read our criticisms and praise of policies affecting teens. We take stands on education, access to mental health, foster youth rights, teens' rights to free speech and more. There you can donate to help us provide a place where teen voices are valued.

Free copies of L.A. Youth for Los Angeles teachers

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ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

I have been illustrating for L.A. Youth since 10th grade and this is my second cover. In most art classes, I am my own critic; however, when illustrating for a publication I have to follow my editor's directions. I value my experience at L.A. Youth because I now feel prepared to work under art directors with specific demands in the real world.

Lily Clark, 17, Immaculate Heart HS



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BEHIND THE SCENES

It's important to be prepared for earthquakes. In our office we have a box with food, a first-aid kit and other supplies, and we recently bought fire extinguishers. On Oct. 21 we took part in the Great California ShakeOut, a drill to practice what to do when an earthquake strikes. We got under our desks and later planned what to do if an earthquake hits when our teen staff is here. We feel as ready as we can be. If you need help getting ready, turn to page 8.



YOUR SAY

STAY IN TOUCH WITH US

Did you like a story in this issue? Hate it? Could you relate? Tell us what you think. Leave a comment on [layouth.com](#) or on our Facebook page. You can also e-mail us at editor@layouth.com or send us a letter to L.A. Youth • 5967 W. 3rd St. Suite 301 • Los Angeles CA 90036. We might choose your comment to be published in the newspaper.

OCTOBER 2010 ISSUE

BEING A NERD IS AWESOME

I CAN REALLY relate to the article "The perks of being a nerd." I'm not really a nerd but I like to read scientific books about things like jets and cars. Sometimes when my friends see me reading these kinds of things they make fun of me. I don't listen because I really like this kind of stuff. It's the same with Jose. He loves being a nerd and studying and learning. You can't judge him for that. It's just who he is and you can't change that.

Ahmad Jiha

Wilson MS (Glendale)

I TOO AM a nerd and I absolutely love it. I love to read and learn new words because I like seeing the expressions on adults' faces when they hear my extensive vocabulary. I used to be embarrassed to be called a nerd but now when somebody calls me a nerd I smile and say, "That's me."

Elisa Murillo

Madison MS (North Hollywood)

KUDOS TO YOU—I'M a nerd too and I love it! Nerds will change the world so keep your nose in the books and the world will be your oyster!!

Cicely Shermaine Majeed

Comment on Facebook

TAKING A BIKE INSTEAD OF THE BUS

I COULD RELATE to the article "Life in the bike lane." I enjoy riding my bike around my neighborhood. Some days, my family and I go out for a walk around the neighborhood and I take my bike sometimes. I ride ahead and enjoy the scenic views of the mountains and the smiles on people's faces when I say hello to them. The smell of the fresh air calms me down. It feels like a whole different world. When I want to change my mood, I always go on a bike ride.

Natalie Baghdadlian

Wilson MS

I LOVE GETTING around on my bike. It makes me feel so free! I get to explore the city and wherever I want instead of waiting for the bus. The bus is crowded, smelly and almost always late. Taking bike rides is so liberating and fun.

Kimberly Flores

Madison MS

VISITING COLLEGES HELPED A GIRL PLAN FOR HER FUTURE

I CAN RELATE to "Picturing myself at college" because my parents and I always talk about having a good education. All I had ever wanted was to go to USC until I read about other universities like UC Davis and NYU. I'm still thinking of what college I should go to. I know I have a hard decision ahead of me, but researching different universities over the next few years will help me make my decision.

Linnette Holgado

Madison MS

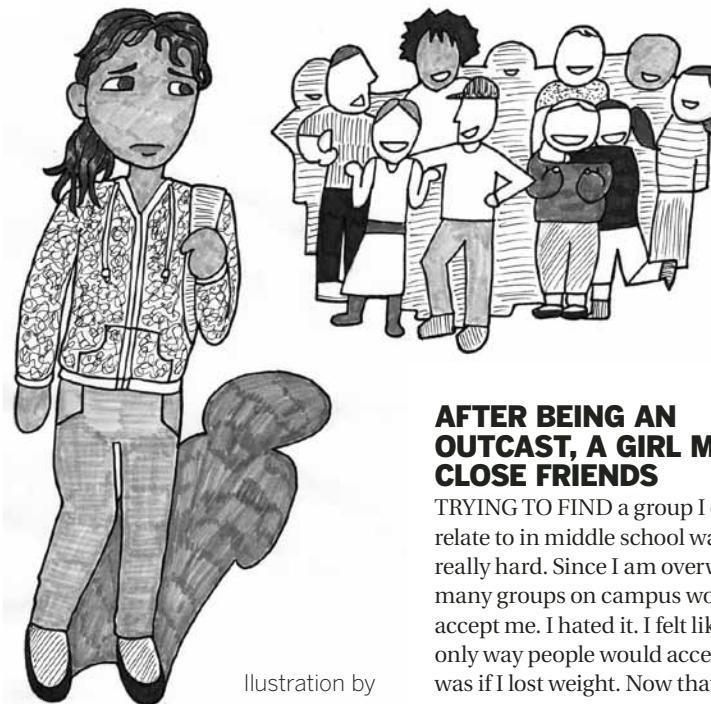


Illustration by
Amy Fan, 16,
Temple City HS

I LOVED READING the article, "Picturing myself at college." I would like to go to college too. She was lucky to visit different colleges in Northern California. College changes a lot of people. I think you should go to college, get a degree and have a great career. So Yesenia, go to college and have a great future!

Celine Der Boghsian

Wilson MS

LOOKING AT THE CANDIDATES FOR GOVERNOR

WE WERE JUST discussing this in class today, and I totally agree with your position. The sad thing is that this whole country is a mess, and it's so hard to actually do anything about it.

Suahauna

Comment on [layouth.com](#)

I ABSOLUTELY LOVE this story. I'm not very much into politics so I didn't really know any of the candidates' plans to make California strong again. I was confused and didn't know who I was going to vote for but after reading this article I got a pretty good idea of who will get my vote. Thanks Aaron and L.A. Youth for the article.

Patricia Chavarria

Comment on Facebook

for who I am and don't care about what I dress like or how rich or poor I am. They like my personality and are cool to hang out with.

Name withheld

I THINK A lot of teenagers are too self-conscious about what they look or act like. People are afraid to be themselves. Some kids tell others that they dress funny or ask why they like doing something, as though it's the strangest thing they've heard. I think people should just be who they are, because people will like them for it and want to know the "real you."

Sara Kwan

Wilson MS

A GIRL WAS SMOKING MARIJUANA

I COULD RELATE to the article, "The lows of getting high." A lot of people I know have been affected by drugs or other addictions like drinking. When a girl offered the writer weed, she should have said no. My family has been affected by addictions and I know it affects relationships, trust and responsibilities. And like the writer, I have thankfully seen people stop doing drugs and live healthy and happy lives.

Jack Mosier

Wilson MS

LEARNING CPR TO BE PREPARED FOR EMERGENCIES

"HOW TO SAVE a life" caught my eye because it seemed like an interesting article and it was. Before reading this, I had no clue how to perform CPR. I also didn't know that CPR is used when someone's heart stops beating. I'm glad I learned the basics for saving a life. Hopefully in the future I'll take classes like the writer and learn CPR in more detail.

Nazik Zakaryan

Wilson MS

WHEN I WAS 3 years old I choked on a blue raspberry Jolly Rancher. My mom started panicking, but my dad quickly did the Heimlich maneuver. The candy came out and my life was saved. It pays to know rescue methods and I'm thankful my dad knew what to do.

Mary Tutunjyan

Madison MS

My community needs a hospital

When I was hit by a car, it was hard traveling a long distance to get treated

By Ronsanise Johnson

16, Animo Locke HS #3

The hospital near my house was shut down in 2007 because of poor care. I didn't know this until last year when I got hit by a car and really needed the hospital, King/Drew. Having to go farther away to treat my broken leg made things hard on me and my family.

Last December after school me and three of my friends were walking on 108th Street to catch the bus from Watts to my house in Inglewood. Near the corner of San Pedro Street, we decided to cross the street. Looking both ways, we saw that there were no cars coming. Two of my friends started crossing the street and I followed right behind them. Out of nowhere a black car came rushing down the street and hit me.

I was hit so hard that I flew several feet into the air. Coming down, the back of my head hit the windshield. I remember thinking, "Oh my god I can't believe this is happening to me!" It hurt at first, then the pain went away. I rolled off the car and landed in the street. My body was numb and I had a nasty taste in my mouth. I looked down and saw my left leg bleeding.

THE AMBULANCE RIDE WAS TAKING TOO LONG

About 25 minutes later the fire department came and wrapped my leg in an inflated orange brace. After a few minutes the ambulance came. After we were driving for about 30 minutes, the siren stopped, but the lights were still on. I asked, "Why are we still driving?" The paramedic said, "We have to take you to Harbor UCLA." I knew that hospital was in Torrance, and I didn't understand why we had to drive all the way out there when King/Drew was less than three miles from my school. After 45 minutes, I went to sleep.

When we got to Harbor UCLA I found out that bones in my left leg were broken. I had surgery to have metal plates screwed into my knee and ankle to help my bones heal correctly. When I woke up the next day, I was in so much pain all I could do was cry.

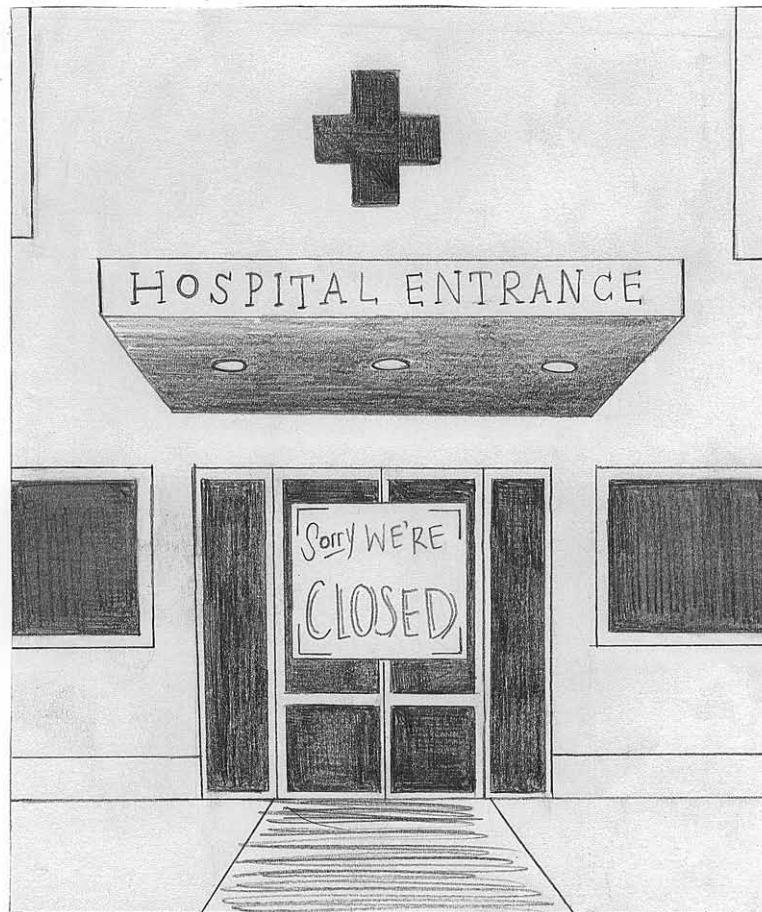


Illustration by Michelle Cao, 16, Temple City HS

I was in the hospital for six days. My mom was there every day. My mother's car was broken down so she and my seven brothers and sisters had to catch the bus from Inglewood to the hospital, which was 13 miles away. It took three buses and about two hours. It would have taken two buses and half that time—about an hour—to get to King/Drew from our house.

Some days my mom had to spend the night at the hospital with me because she didn't have enough money to take the bus home and come back. She slept in a chair that turned into a bed. One day I heard my mom on the phone saying that it's too far to come back and forth to the hospital to sit with me. It made me feel like I was holding my mom back from doing things that she needed to do.

I missed two months of school because of my leg. After I was out of the hospital I went back for check-ups every few weeks. Because it's so far away, I had to miss a whole day of school to go to the doctor. It's a hassle to catch three busses and wait about 30 minutes for each bus and sometimes they run slower at night. Because I usually spent three to four hours at the doctor's office, sometimes I would have an appointment for 10 a.m. and not get home until 10 p.m.

I would've missed less school if King/Drew was never shut down because it was only a few miles from my school. It was hard to watch my grades drop from As to fails in some classes. I'd think, "Dang, I just got caught up and thanks to this appointment I'm a day behind."

PEOPLE GOT BAD CARE AT THE OLD HOSPITAL

You might be wondering why King/Drew hospital closed. It was shut down in 2007 because patient care was so bad. After my accident I wanted to know why the hospital had closed. I read an article about an incident that happened in 2004 when a lady died on the floor of the emergency room because staff ignored her for hours. There were other problems; other people had died needlessly and the hospital failed to meet standards during inspections. What if I had gone to King/Drew and I didn't get the care I needed?

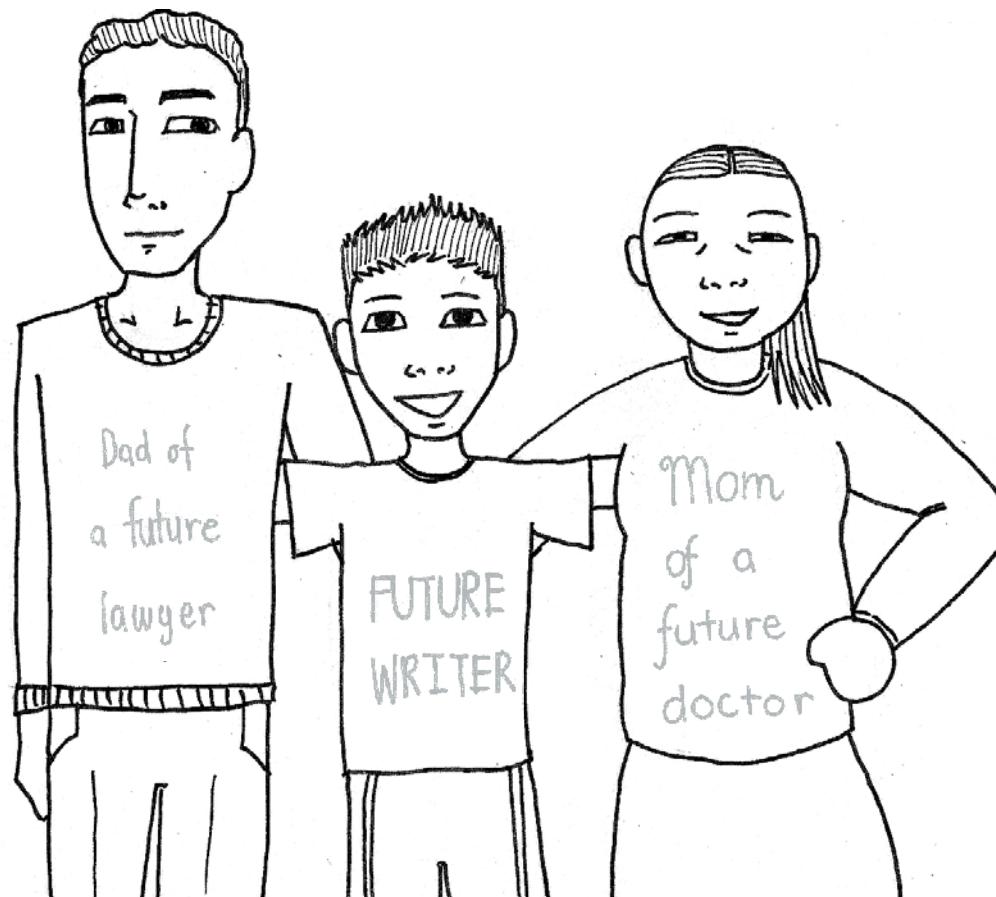
I understand that the hospital had problems, but I wish the government would have helped King/Drew treat the patients with the right care instead of shutting it down. There needed to be better administrators to oversee the doctors and nurses. I feel that it is important for there to be a hospital closer to where I live because there are people in my neighborhood who can't afford to go back and forth to Harbor UCLA. People in our community pay taxes and we deserve to have a hospital in the area.

I heard the hospital is going to be re-opening in 2013. I think it should open sooner. Sometimes I wonder if the people in charge really care enough to open

it back up. If they cared, why didn't they fix it instead of closing it down? And why has it taken so long to re-open? If it does reopen I hope the hospital will be a better, safer place.



Ronsanise's leg is mostly healed, but she still has some nerve damage. She is glad her mom's car is fixed so they can drive to her next check-up.



By Bon Jin Koo

18, Crescenta Valley HS (*La Crescenta*)

As early as sixth grade, my parents would ask, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" I didn't know. That was so far away, why should I care? "Are you going to be a businessman like me?" my dad would joke. They'd ask me if I was interested in being a doctor or lawyer, or going into business or computer science. They believed those are the jobs that make a lot of money. They want me to be successful, which to them means supporting myself and my family, and giving back to the community. I wanted that too, but as I got older I realized I wanted to do those things my own way.

Ever since eighth grade, I have liked writing for fun, but I didn't think being a writer would be a job that I'd make a lot of money doing. So, freshman year I thought I would become a scientist, inspired by television shows on the Discovery Channel and Animal Planet like *Myth-Busters*, *Nigel's Wild Wild World* and *Crocodile Hunter*. I chose zoology as my career. My parents were surprised by my interest in science because no one in our family had ever gone into science. My family mostly consisted of farmers, teachers and business people.

At the beginning of sophomore year, I began to lose interest in science. Science was an easy subject for me and the classes got boring. My biology teacher called me the "sleeping genius" because I'd sleep through his lectures but still get As on his tests. I worried more about getting in trouble for sleeping than I did about my grades.

The more my dad asked me what I wanted to do, the more I realized how much I didn't want to study science in college. On college discussion websites I read that a zoology major has to take sciences classes that I wasn't interested in like chemistry and physics. I could make enough money to support myself as a scientist, but I realized that money wasn't everything in a career. My parents wanted me to pursue a career that made a lot of money, but I wanted to discover what I really liked to do, not get a job that pays well but makes me miserable.

I GOT INTO THE DISCUSSIONS IN ENGLISH CLASS

That year English became my favorite class. When we read *Lord of the Flies*, a book about boys who are stranded on an island, I didn't really like it. I thought it would be a fun, light-hearted story, but it was serious. We'd have discussions about themes, like good versus evil. The teacher would ask, "Do you think this character gave in to animal-like instincts?" I said I thought one of the main characters, Ralph, remained civilized, even when he was in a survival mindset and on the verge of murder. Some classmates disagreed with me.

There were five people who always raised their hands during these discussions, and I was one of them. At first, we raised our hands before we talked, but as it got more intense, we would start shouting our points out. "OK, let's let other people talk," the teacher would say to us. The discussion took a book I didn't like and made it into something I could really think about. It was surprising. I could put myself in

Choosing my own path

I'm pursuing my passion for writing, even though it's not what my parents wanted me to do

the characters' situations and really think about my own morals and values. It turned a boring read into an amazing discussion.

When our class was reading the Shakespeare play, *Much Ado About Nothing*, out loud, I would say my lines in a British accent to make it more fun. The whole class got really into it! Some classmates also tried British accents. Best of all, Ms. Ruggiero, my English teacher, assigned free writes, which were writing assignments where we'd have a week to write about any topic. Most people would groan, "Another piece of homework." But I'd say, "Yes!" We had to write at least a page, but I usually wrote two. I started to think of writing as more than a hobby.

Excited at my discovery, I told my parents I would become a writer. My parents gave me a quizzical look and asked me, "Why?" My dad asked, "Are you sure you don't want to pursue medicine like being a doctor or dentist?" I said that science didn't appeal to me anymore, and I liked English better. My mom added that very few writers become successful. I was disappointed my parents weren't more enthusiastic. I didn't talk back to them because talking back to your parents is a sign of disrespect in our family. "We'll see what happens," my dad said with a subtle smile on his face.

I continued to write. When I have an idea, I'll write a short story, sometimes five in a month. I post them on Facebook as "Notes." As of now, I have 287 notes. I love writing short stories. My short stories usually revolve around a character struggling to overcome an obstacle in life. The obstacle usually reflects what I'm

struggling with at the time. I was a bit stressed out one week when I had math homework that took five hours to do each night. I wrote a story in which the main character was stressing over math homework, and his little sister helped cheer him up. My endings are usually heart-warming, with the intent to encourage anyone who happens to read them.

I LIKE SHARING MY STORIES WITH OTHERS

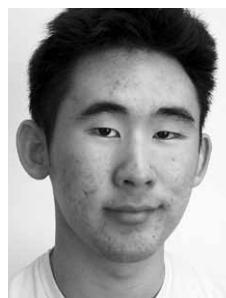
I also write my reflections on Bible passages. I want everyone to know what I learned so I always set the privacy on these notes to "Everyone" so that anyone could read them. The whole purpose of writing is for someone else to read what I've written and understand it. My friends leave comments like, "Bon Jin, that's amazing," and "You have an amazing talent for writing." Reading their comments is humbling and I think, "I'm not that good."

During junior year when our family visited my grandmother for her birthday, I gave her a handmade card. I wrote her a note saying how our relationship wasn't exactly perfect, and I looked forward to making it better. I'd written it in English, but my grandmother can't read English, so my uncle translated. My grandmother said thank you and that even though it was a translation it still touched her. My mom responded, "Don't you know? Bon Jin's a magician with words." I couldn't help but smile. I was surprised that my mom gave me such a big compliment. I thought, "What's with this change in attitude?" I saw that my mom was becoming more accepting.

Sometimes I doubted if I would be successful or happy pursuing English. My English teacher was getting her master's in English and she would tell us that she had a 100-page writing assignment. Another teacher, who'd studied English in college said, "No matter what you study, you're going to do a lot of work, but in English, you do more writing." I worried about the workload but eventually I didn't mind. Everything takes hard work if you're going to be successful. Once I get my college degree, I want writing to be part of my future. I would love to teach English in high school and work my way up to teach writing in college.

My parents' idea of success is financial security, but I see success as more than that. I want to make money and wake up every day happy to go to work. I can definitely see myself being successful financially by teaching English in high school, and I want to prove to my parents that I can make money by doing something I love.

When I asked my friends what they wanted to be, I was impressed by some of their answers. A good friend of mine kept switching from a doctor to an architect.



Bon Jin is writing a short story that he hopes to enter into a writing contest.

DO YOUR DREAMS DIFFER FROM YOUR PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS?

"I really want to go to NYU to study the arts. My parents want me to go to medical school because they're both nurses. I used to really want that, but then I started doing art and painting and drawing and I realized that's what I really want to do."

**VICTOR BETETA, 17,
UNIVERSITY HS**



"I want to be a fashion designer or a writer. But my parents say that those are just pastimes, not real jobs. If it's not anything to do with medical stuff they tell me no."

**CASSIDY PALACIOS,
14, BRAVO MEDICAL
MAGNET HS**



"My mom and dad put a lot of pressure on me in school. I'm planning to become a police officer, but my mom and dad say no because it's too dangerous. But I want to make this a better community for everyone."

**CARLOS MARTINEZ, 14,
BRAVO MEDICAL
MAGNET HS**



"My father really doesn't have any expectations for me. I want to be a sports announcer. He's constantly putting me down, saying I'm not even going to attend college. It makes me feel bad because I work really hard in school."

**JEREMY GUAMAN, 13,
BRAVO MEDICAL
MAGNET HS**

"They always want me to do something huge. When I told them that I really want to be a journalist, my mom said, "No, you should be the editor of a newspaper." I'm not mad that they want huge things for me, but I'm happy with something simple."

**YEJEAN KIM, 17,
ARCADIA HS**

"My parents tried to keep me away from what I want to do—going into the Army Reserves for nursing. My mom

was like, 'No, you're going to get called away to Iraq.' But after basic training, I'm going to nursing school. When they realized it's what I wanted to do, they didn't try to stop me. My dad said he'd let me figure it out and do what I want to do."

**CAITLIN BRYAN, 18,
LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE**

Another friend wants to be an engineer. They all had high-paying careers in mind. But then I asked them if that's what they really wanted to do. "I really want to be a singer though," one of my friends said. "I wish I could go into art," another said.

I WISH PARENTS WOULD BE MORE OPEN-MINDED

My parents came from families that did all they could to earn money. I understand why our parents want us to get high-paying jobs so that we don't have to struggle like they did, but I'm disappointed by how parents automatically assume some careers don't make very much money. Parents should realize that just because a job doesn't have a reputation as being high-paying, doesn't mean we won't be successful if we work hard.

Last May I applied to my school's newspaper and I was accepted. I had applied to yearbook my sophomore and junior year and been rejected. Instead of giving up I decided to apply to be on the newspaper. It was my

last chance to get into a writing class. I had to take a writing test and be interviewed to get into journalism. I was surprised I was accepted because I'm a senior and I didn't think they'd want me because I'd be around for only one year. They told me seniors get lazy writing articles, but I assured the editors in my interview that I would definitely not slack off.

So far, I'm having a lot of fun in my journalism class. I can't write my fictional short stories here, but I use my creativity to make articles more interesting to read. My school's journalism class produced two issues. I even got an article published in the second issue, which is saying something because there are a lot of staff writers.

I have a lot of options for my future. I could have easily chosen to become a scientist or a businessman. Instead of going for the job that pays the most, I know loving what you do is more important. Writing is a passion I wouldn't have found if I didn't have the courage to decide to pursue it. I know I'll succeed if I'm doing something I love.

Is your family prepared for an earthquake?

SINCE WE LIVE IN CALIFORNIA, it's important to be ready for an earthquake. But most of our teen staff said their families weren't. If you're not ready, see our list for what you should put in your earthquake kit.

YES, WE'RE READY

The earthquake in Chino two years ago was five miles from where I live. One of my mom's vases broke. That's when we started thinking about it. We said we have to be prepared or else we'll suffer. Now we have a box set aside. It's in the corner of the house so if anything falls, it won't affect it. There's canned food for three weeks, water, for warmth there are blankets, flashlights, a first-aid kit and a crank radio. My dad said a radio is important if cell phones and the Internet go down. And I have a book in there. If we're in different rooms we're going to meet in the dining room and get under our big stainless steel dining table.

—Jerry Qin, 16, Walnut HS

On July 29, 2008, we were lounging around the house when suddenly the walls started to shake. I was calm but my sister, who was 11 at the time, screamed, grabbed onto my arm and started trembling.

After that, I took the initiative and got my family prepared. I wanted my little sister to feel safe but since I can't control earthquakes, being prepared for one is the best I can do. My parents agreed that we should make an earthquake kit. I found an earthquake preparedness checklist on the Internet. We had a lot of the items already, so all we had to do was round them up.

We keep our kit in a box in the garage. It includes a first-aid kit, water, canned food, ponchos, flashlights, batteries and clothes. We also have a safe containing all of our important documents. Making sure documents like passports, medical records and social security cards are safe is important because having them would make it easier to get our lives back to normal after a disaster.

After getting the kit together, my sister and I feel safer. Hopefully we'll never need to use it, but we have it just in case.

—Kristy Plaza, 16, Duarte HS



HOW TO GET READY

BUILD YOUR OWN KIT

These are the basic items that you should have in your earthquake kit:

- One gallon of water per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation
- A three-day supply of non-perishable food
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio and extra batteries
 - Flashlight and extra batteries
 - First-aid kit
 - Whistle to signal for help
- Dust mask to help filter contaminated air; plastic sheeting and duct tape
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities
 - Can opener
 - Local maps
- Cell phone with chargers or solar charger
- To see a list of additional items you may want in your kit, go to www.ready.gov

MAKE A PLAN

Find out how to make an earthquake plan with your family at www.ready.gov

NO, WE'RE NOT

I wish we were more prepared. My mom always tells us to make sure our room is clean and make sure there are shoes by the bed. If an earthquake hits, we can put on our shoes without the trouble of looking for them or tripping over things on our way out. We don't have a first-aid kit at home. I think we should have one. There's no bottled water or emergency food. Lately I've been thinking about it a lot. They say we're going to have a big one. We should be prepared.

—Patricia Chavarria, 19

If a huge earthquake hits, we'd be screwed. My family has no clue what to do during an earthquake. When there's an earthquake, my mom yells out "Come downstairs!" I think, "I don't think it's a good idea to move right now." We have a few things for an emergency, but they're scattered around, like Band-Aids in a drawer and canned food in the cupboards. We don't have any emergency numbers memorized and we don't have any relatives or friends near us so we would have no one to rely on in an emergency. I would love to be prepared.

—Jose Zacarias, 17, Orthopaedic Hospital Medical Magnet HS

I'm a Red Cross youth member and it's sad that I'm not prepared. They teach us so we can go around telling people "this is what you need" but I don't have any of those things. We have a first-aid kit but that's it. My family never gets together to plan things out.

—Victor Beteta, 17, University HS

I told my mom we have to get an earthquake kit. She said, "We're prepared. We have food." But we don't have a plan, a place where we can meet. We don't have water. She's like "we're fine." I kind of don't think about it, it's like oh well.

—Amy Fan, 16, Temple City HS

I'm originally from Florida and that's the hurricane state. We just have our old hurricane kit, which is not the same thing at all. There's rain gear in it. When there was a small earthquake this summer my family was the only one freaking out. I think people don't think of getting prepared because the Northridge earthquake was so long ago.

—Yejean Kim, 17, Arcadia HS

We're not prepared at all. We don't have extra anything. I never think about it.

—Christian Santiago, 17, University HS

I'm a Barbie girl

My collectible dolls are more than toys

By Jessica Marin

16, Culver City HS

I am a 16-year-old who still likes Barbie. On the top shelf of my bookcase are four Barbies, never removed from their boxes, in mint condition.

She is more than just a plastic toy. She represents how I want to be when I'm older—so sophisticated, glamorous, stylish. I love how she lives in different cities, has different careers and seems to be a part of different cultures. And I admire that she can do all these things while being so well dressed.

Barbie was my absolute favorite toy when I was a little girl; I played with her for hours. My mom ran a daycare at our house and we had puzzles, balls, jump ropes and hula hoops, but the majority of my day was spent with Barbie. I was her stylist and hairdresser, and she was my model.

When I was about 8, I stopped playing with Barbie. I felt like I was too old for her. I put my dolls in a big plastic storage box under my bed. Over time I gave about half away.

By eighth grade my new love was fashion. I bought CosmoGirl every month. I thought the clothes in the magazine were so pretty and I liked how you can express yourself with your clothes. Then I started reading Teen Vogue and now I read Nylon and Glamour and sometimes Vogue.

THIS BARBIE WAS SO STYLISH I HAD TO HAVE HER

I never thought I'd buy another Barbie. But when I was 13, I went to a yard sale with my mom on a Saturday morning. I hadn't noticed the Barbie for sale until my mom brought it over. She held a box in her hands and inside I saw a gorgeous brunette Barbie. She was Autumn in Paris Barbie, walking along the Champs-Elysees, a famous street in Paris.

She looked très chic with her beret (a French hat), a long burgundy skirt, plaid jacket and a cane, like something straight out of the pages of Vogue.

The box was shaped differently than regular Barbie boxes and it said "Collectors." "She must be expensive," I thought. My room needed more decorations and I thought she would look good on top of my bookcase where there was just a small jewelry box. Turns out she was only \$5. I wanted her to stay perfect, so I kept her in her box and put her on my shelf. She looked like a mini model.

After buying Autumn in Paris Barbie, I became in-



Jessica shows off her Barbie collection. Photo by Dana Green, 16, North Hollywood HS Zoo Magnet

terested in Barbie culture. Last year Barbie turned 50. Designers created collections around Barbie during New York fashion week. A make-up company sold kits based on classic Barbies, like the original Barbie whose kit had red lipstick and black eye shadow. I found out that people collect Barbies. An original from 1959 can be worth \$8,000. It's crazy that a Barbie can be worth that much.

That next spring I was with my mom at the Salvation Army and while browsing I found another Barbie from the same collection as my Barbie in Paris! She was

Spring in Tokyo Barbie. She's a dark-haired doll with a classic cream suit and a boxy black hat. She cost \$20. This time I didn't hesitate to buy her because I was thinking of starting a collection. I really liked how Barbie represented the culture of major fashion cities. I imagined myself going around the world dressed like her.

A few months later, my aunt gave me another doll as a gift when I graduated from middle school. She was a flamboyant red-haired Irish Dance Barbie representing the festivals where young girls compete in traditional Irish dance competitions. Because her hair is curly I could imagine it bouncing when she is dancing.

A few weeks later I went to the L.A. County Fair and a woman was selling collectible toys. She had about 50 Barbies. I walked around saying "Oh my god, I want this one!" at almost every Barbie. My dad jokingly rolled his eyes and made fun of me. There was an Audrey Hepburn Barbie from the movie Breakfast at Tiffany's on sale for \$110. I love Hepburn and I've seen that movie five times. She is my idol. She set the standard for classic style with the little black dress, pearls and dark sunglasses. Then I saw an Eliza Doolittle doll, Hepburn's character in My Fair Lady. This Barbie had a beautiful lace gown with a gorgeous sun hat like the ones they used back in the early 1900s. She cost \$75. I asked my dad, expecting him to say no, but he bought it for me. He was in a happy mood. Yes, it was expensive, but I thought she was worth it. I looked at her in the car on the way home from the fair, giddy with excitement, like a little kid on Christmas morning.

MY FRIENDS DON'T UNDERSTAND

The next day I was so excited. I told my friends, "Guess what! I got a really cool Barbie!" They said, "You're crazy." Especially when I told them I had spent \$75. "What's wrong with you?" they said. I started to think maybe I'm too old for Barbie, but I just laughed. I didn't think it was absurd. I loved my Barbie.

I told my French teacher about my Eliza doll and she told me that she also loved and collected dolls. During spring break my friend Marilyn and I had a girls day out with our French teacher. We went to Toys "R" Us so my teacher could buy a baby gift. We went straight to the Barbie section. She told us that her house was full of Tinker Bell items. I thought, "OK so I'm 16 and I still like Barbies, there is nothing wrong with that. My French teacher still likes Tinker Bell and she's a grown woman!" I felt relieved I wasn't the only one who still liked toys.

When I look at my Barbies, I see art. Their clothes are so elaborate and fancy. It gets me thinking about fashion even more. One day I'd like to oversee photo shoots for a fashion magazine. Inspiration can come from anywhere, including a Barbie.



Jessica says it's OK to still have an attachment to childhood toys.

Dad, please stop smoking

I've tried to get him to quit but he won't listen to me

By Jennifer Choi

15, Crescenta Valley HS (*La Crescenta*)

I was born into a smoking family. My dad, uncles and older cousins smoke all the time. They never listen to anyone's pleas to quit. I hate it when they smoke right in front of my face or at my house because I can't stand the smell. I'm scared that one day I might get sick from inhaling the wafts of thick smoke. Even though I tell them about the risks to their health, nothing has stopped their addiction, even when my grandpa died from smoking.

My dad started smoking at age 23. He smokes a pack every day now. I didn't think much about my dad's smoking or how bad it was for his health until my grandpa got sick when I was in the third grade. One of the most disappointing sights that I have seen of my dad was at the reception after my grandpa's funeral. My dad and his brothers went outside and started to smoke. I couldn't believe it. I was so mad that I wanted to go over to them and snap their cigarettes in half. It looked like they didn't care about their father's death and were disrespecting him.

My grandpa smoked for 40 years before he was diagnosed with throat cancer at the age of 80. He moved in with us and my parents cared for him for the next seven years. The cancer made it hard for him to swallow food and he had to have a hole cut in his throat to make it easier for him to breathe. It was covered with a cloth, but I imagined it to be a deep black hole filled with blood.

My grandpa was unable to drink or eat anything. He was given a special type of milk through a tube that was surgically cut into his stomach. He also couldn't walk or shower by himself anymore. Because his cancer was weakening his vocal chords, he had a raspy voice and his breathing was loud. It was as if he was slowly dying in front of me.

I would listen to Korean radio with him while sitting next to his recliner, help my mom wash and dry his clothes, and pour the milk into the tube. To me he wasn't a sick old patient. I adored him.

MY SISTER AND I TRIED TO GET THROUGH TO MY DAD

When I saw my grandpa suffering from cancer, I knew that I couldn't let this happen to my dad. I wanted him to quit. My older sister and I put together an anti-smoking PowerPoint presentation. I hunted for information on the web and my sister laid out everything on the computer.

One of the examples I used was a story about a man who started smoking at 13 and died 20 years later. He left his grieving wife and 4-year-old son. Just days before he died, he was seen smoking in his hospital room with his family beside him. I saw the picture of the dad lying on the bed. He looked like a car crash victim. His shriveled body, sunken cheeks and pointy shoulder blades gave



Illustration by Lily Clark, 17, Immaculate Heart HS

me chills and goose bumps. I didn't want to ever be in the position of that little boy.

We also showed my dad a video about a grandma smoking through a hole in her throat. I shuddered when I heard her deep, hoarse voice uttering, "They say nicotine isn't addictive ... How can they say that?" as she sucked the cigarette with her eyes closed and the smoke billowed out the hole. These stories showed how harmful smoking can be.

I knew the gory examples and pictures were powerful, but I also wanted something more personal. So my sister told me to end the PowerPoint with a video of me sharing my thoughts. I told myself that I was going to be harsh. But when I started to record, I could only say how I couldn't afford to lose my dad to such a preventable action. Then, I started to cry. I ended the video saying that I loved him and wanted him to stay healthy and to always be there for me. After he watched the presentation, he hugged me and said, "I'll try to stop for you." But he didn't take the whole thing that seriously because he walked right out of the room and didn't talk to me about it.

Later that year, my grandpa's cancer got so serious that he was transferred to a hospital. The day I went to St. Vincent Medical Center to visit my grandpa was a nightmare. I walked into his room with my parents. My aunts and uncles were already there. Everyone had blank expressions on their faces. My eyes shot to the machine that monitored his heart. Instead of going up and down with each strong heartbeat, the line was almost straight. My grandpa was heaving and losing strength with every passing minute. I didn't expect to see him dying so fast. I had thought he would survive, leave the hospital and get better. It hit me hard. I backed out of the room and paced in the hallway. In the car, I cried. Five days later, he died.

The day after my grandpa died was like a dream. I had never thought about death in my family and for it to happen felt unreal. I began to think about the times I took his condition so lightly and how I didn't help him enough at home. All I could do was promise myself that I wouldn't let this happen to my dad.

I WAS SHOCKED HE DIDN'T STOP

I expected my dad to quit after what happened to his own dad, but it was exactly the opposite. He smoked more often. I thought to myself, "How can he possibly continue to smoke?" My dad uses the weapon that killed my grandfather. Doesn't he feel guilty or troubled by the thought that he'll be following in my grandfather's footsteps if he doesn't stop?

Every day I nagged my dad to quit smoking, but he would always respond, "Don't worry! I promise I will quit tomorrow. Let me just have this last one," but would never follow through. He says that he has stress and needs something to alleviate it. He's a manager of an air conditioning company and works long hours under the sun every day. He leaves at 8 in the morning and comes home around 10 at night. After dinner, he slips out the back door to steal puffs of nicotine-infested smoke until he feels relaxed. But this shouldn't be his excuse, because there are plenty of other ways to relieve stress. It's as if he's a hostage to those little cigarettes.

During health class in the summer before high

school, I learned more about the effects of smoking. There was a lesson in my health book about nicotine, which is the chemical in tobacco that causes addiction. It tells the brain you can't do anything unless you have a cigarette. This reminded me of the time when my dad told my mom that he wanted to quit for his health, but it was really hard. He said that he went without a cigarette at work for just two hours and started hyperventilating. He began to feel dizzy and dropped his tools. All he could focus on was smoking a cigarette.

I found statistics that said nearly 60,000 people die a year from secondhand smoke either from heart disease, lung cancer, asthma attacks or other infections. Women who live with a smoker have a 91 percent greater risk of heart disease and twice the risk of dying from lung cancer; 91 percent, that's a lot. I was paranoid that when I got older, I'd be one of those 60,000 people because of my dad.

made me smell the smoke.

A few months later, I would smell smoke for a few seconds even though nobody was smoking anywhere near me. It was weird, but I ignored it at first. But when I kept on smelling it during class, in the library and in the car, I freaked out. It felt like the smoke was following me everywhere. I told my sister and to my surprise she was going through it too! I was shocked and scared. We went online and found out that we were going through minor phantosmia, which is smelling imaginary odors.

I CAN'T ESCAPE THE SMELL

When my dad would come back inside after smoking, the smell lingered. I got used to turning on the air conditioning and opening the windows to get rid of the smell. I would run to my room and slam my door and yell at my dad to get out of the house. I felt like a prisoner. My mom saw me crying once because the smell

Every day I nagged my dad to quit smoking. He says that he has stress and needs something to alleviate it. After dinner, he slips out the back door to steal puffs of nicotine-infested smoke until he feels relaxed. But this shouldn't be his excuse, because there are other ways to relieve stress. It's as if he's a hostage to those little cigarettes.

A few months later, I found out that my 25-year-old cousin had started smoking. Maybe he thought it was OK because he saw the other men in my family do the same thing. I wanted to tell my dad that he was setting a bad example for the younger people in my family. I was so angry that I knew I had to try again to make him quit.

After school one day, I typed "nasty effects of smoking" into Google and found images of people with rotting teeth, deep wrinkles, black circles under their eyes and patches of no hair. I felt nauseous when I saw a picture of a healthy pink lung next to one all black and shriveled up. It looked like a dead, burnt rat that oozed with wet tar. I wanted to get the point across to my dad. So that night I showed my dad the pictures. I heard a sound that I wasn't expecting. A laugh. He was actually laughing. How could he not take this seriously? He said in Korean, "That's not going to happen to me. I bet some of them are Photoshopped just to create a more dramatic effect." I was pissed. I was clenching my teeth so I wouldn't talk back to my dad. If he wasn't going to take it seriously, I wouldn't either. I wasn't going to waste my energy on someone who wasn't willing to change. I decided to give up.

After that, whenever I saw him inhaling the chemicals and cancer-causing toxins, I was upset because he

was so unbearable and lectured my dad to quit once and for all. She admitted to him that she was sick and tired of the smell too.

My father still smokes. He spends thousands of dollars a year to have that temporary pleasure and calmness. We've tried to get him to see a therapist to quit, but he keeps saying that he wants to do it on his own. I don't want to give up on him. But at the same time, I'm afraid that my next attempt is going to fail just like the previous ones. One thing I've learned after seeing people close to me suffer is to never touch a cigarette. The problem no longer rests in my hands, but in his. Ultimately, my dad needs to give smoking up for his own sake. I just pray that he can be freed soon.

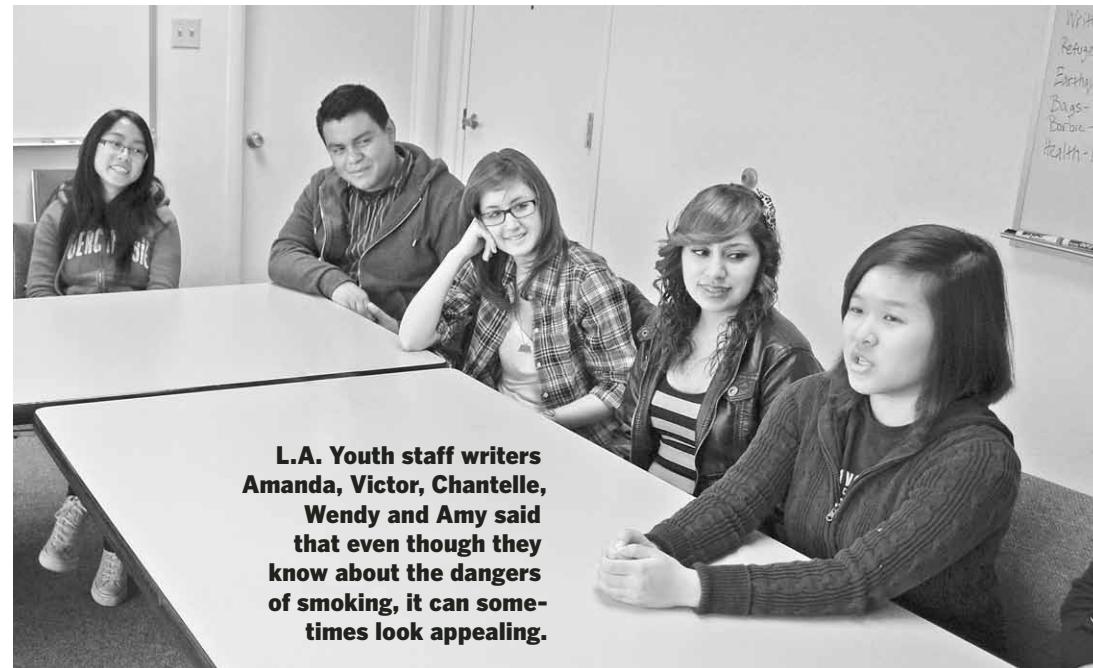


Jennifer thinks it's important to share her experience so she can convince others not to smoke.

'It seems kind of cool'

Teens share their views of smoking

JENNIFER'S STORY ON page 10 got us wondering what teens think about smoking. Some of our teen staff got together to talk about where their views of smoking came from and whether they've been tempted to smoke. Below are excerpts from the discussion.



Editor Amanda Riddle: Does having family members or friends who smoke influence your views of smoking?

Wendy Paniagua, 17, Kennedy HS (Granada Hills): My mom smoked a lot. We would ask, "Where's mom?" and we'd look for her and she'd be outside smoking. It was giving her health problems and she went to the hospital. She stopped after that. I've never really been interested in smoking, seeing my mom do it.

Chantelle Moghadam, 16, Viewpoint School (Calabasas): I have a good friend who smokes and has been smoking for a couple years. He's tried to stop a couple times but hasn't been able to. I think one of his parents smokes and maybe that's why. If one of your family members smokes, that's the first view you see of smoking. Whereas the first thing I saw was in school where they tell you smoking is bad.

Victor Beteta, 17, University HS: I have friends who smoke. We were in a play together. They'd be outside the auditorium smoking. Every time I'd go outside they'd say, "Do you want to smoke?" I always see commercials that say smoking is bad for you. You see people with holes in their throats and it looks really nasty. I guess they think it's not going to happen to them.

Editor Mike Fricano: Where do you think your attitudes toward smoking come from?

Amy Fan, 16, Temple City HS: For me it's school. In first grade the guy who was speaking scared us. He told us not to smoke and he had all these scary demonstrations. Ever since then I was terrified of smoking. Of course now I'm less biased and I have a better view. I'm not going to smoke and I don't like it but I won't judge people who choose to do it. That's their decision.

Amber Federis, 14, Whitney HS (Cerritos): My dad used to smoke. He always tells me he wishes he hadn't done it and it probably cut his life short by a little bit. Now he's really fat because he replaced it with food. He's always like, "If you start, you don't want to be like me, you don't want to be fat when you get older."

Patricia Chavarria, 19: I don't want to smoke because I don't want to let my family down. One day I was in biology class and I saw one of the pictures they had about smoking. It was very clear about all the things that happen. Your fingers and teeth start to get yellow, you can get cancer. I was really freaked out. I took a picture with my phone and I forwarded it to my mom so she could show it to her boyfriend, who smokes, as a reminder about what could happen.

Mike: Have any of you ever been tempted to smoke?

Victor: Since I knew people who would do it, it looked kind of cool I guess. I never got to the point where I did

it, but it was always there.

Amy: In the media it honestly does look sort of appealing to me. You see this bad guy on TV and he's taunting the main character and he's smoking. Then he blows smoke in the main character's face and he throws his head back and laughs. It makes a person seem powerful. I would think, "Smoking, it seems kind of cool." But if you consider all of the things that could happen to you after smoking, it really isn't.

Jessica Marin, 16, Culver City HS: I have this big poster of Audrey Hepburn in the movie Breakfast at Tiffany's. She has a cigarette and she's my idol. So at times—not that I ever wanted to—I thought it looked cool. The cigarette looks pretty.

Christian Santiago, 17, University HS: There are programs telling you it's bad for you but you see people around you doing it and you get used to seeing people smoking.

Patricia: Sometimes it was tempting when I'd go to punk shows. But I still wouldn't do it because of the thoughts of the consequences.

Mike: If one of your good friends started smoking, what do you think you'd say to them to try to get them to stop, or would you even try?

Jessica: Did you guys watch America's Next Top Model? Well, there was this one photo shoot where they did the effects of smoking. What really sticks to me is what it will do to your skin and teeth. I would bring that up to a friend, especially a girl. Look what could happen to you. Your teeth are going to get yellow, and all the effects on the skin.

Christian: I would attempt but I wouldn't go to an extreme point where I'm angry with them. It's their decision but there's that factor where you care about them.

Chantelle: I think if my best friend started smoking I'd try to talk them out of it at first. If they didn't listen to me after that I'd probably be a little more forceful. A person who goes to my school was at a party and he threw his friend's cigarettes in the pool. I think I'd have to do something like that because just talking isn't going to do anything because they've already decided.

Patricia: I just found out my best friend smokes. I was shocked. I gave him a ride home. I asked him, "What's new?" "Well, I started smoking." I was like, "How often?" "Sometimes a whole pack a day." When I dropped him off, he said, "As a memory of me" and gave me a cigarette. I'd never held one. As soon as I got home I threw it away because I knew I'd get in trouble.

Chantelle: Even though smoking is bad I can definitely understand how once you're addicted it can be incredibly hard to quit. Because I'm addicted to caffeine. People tell me, "That's not good for you." My boyfriend tried to get me to stop. I don't listen to him. If I don't have coffee for three or four days, I get headaches, I'm really tired. It'd be even worse with cigarettes. I can't even imagine.

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NEXT
ORIENTATION:
**SATURDAY,
DECEMBER 11**
11 A.M. - NOON

L.A. YOUTH HAS ALLOWED

me to explore journalism and photography. It is a commitment I can manage, even in my busy junior year. I like going to staff meetings because they are casual and friendly and always make me think. The diverse staff comes together from all over L.A. County and we talk about bullying, food, religion or anything important. The discussions inspire us to write stories, and the editors work hard to help you express yourself through words.
—Jasper Nahid, 16, Hamilton HS



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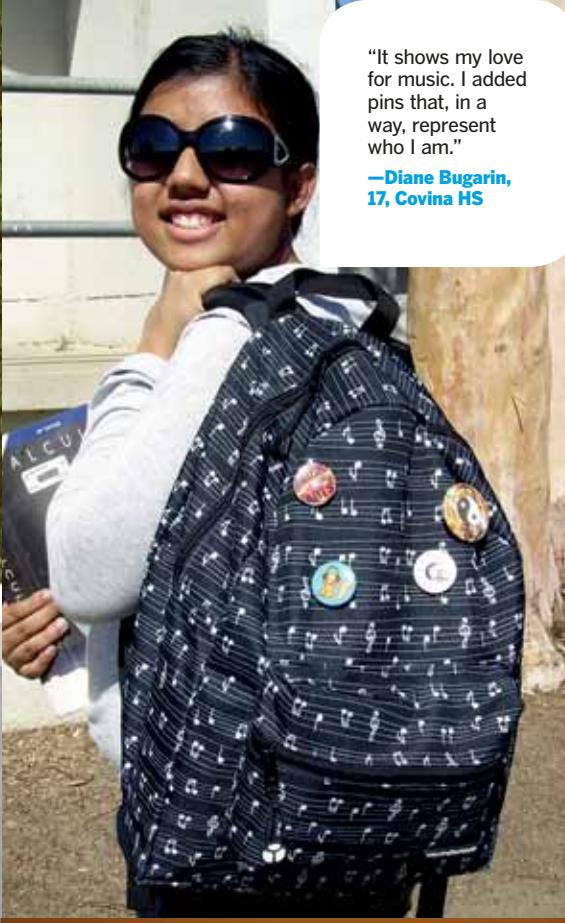
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Keep up with what's new! Find out when new stories and reviews are posted to layouth.com and share what you think.

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"At my school we wear uniforms. I wanted to decorate my backpack to show people a side of me that they don't normally get to see. It says that I like music and that I like to express myself through art. I wrote the Black Eyed Peas, Green Day and 2pac because I like their music and their lyrics mean a lot to me. I drew a broken heart, a peace sign, an abstract face and some other designs on it because I like drawing things that are unusual and colorful—anything that makes me different."

—Jaani Sant,
13, La Cañada
Preparatory School

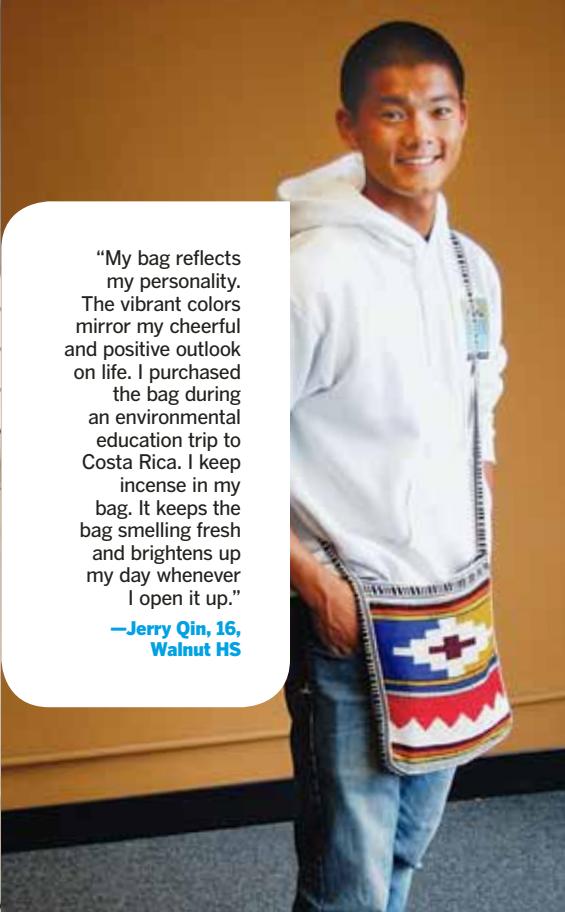


"It shows my love for music. I added pins that, in a way, represent who I am."

—Diane Bugarin,
17, Covina HS

"My bag expresses my creative nature. It says, 'Hey, I'm fun and I like to think outside the box.' I saw a Capri Sun bag online a few years ago on a craft site and instantly fell in love with it, so I made my own. I collected 26 pouches. After rinsing out the excess juice I sewed them together in five panels, which was difficult because of the aluminum material."

—Brittany Sevilla, 17,
Mayfair HS (Lakewood)



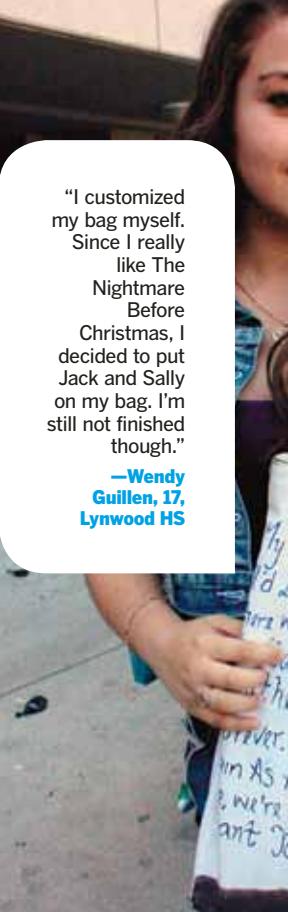
"I customized my bag myself. Since I really like The Nightmare Before Christmas, I decided to put Jack and Sally on my bag. I'm still not finished though."

—Wendy
Guillen, 17,
Lynwood HS



"I got my bag as a gift from a family friend. This bag reminds me of a motherly person. I try to be like one, so I guess this bag reflects that I am loving."

—Ha Young Kwen, 16, Wilson
HS (Hacienda Heights)



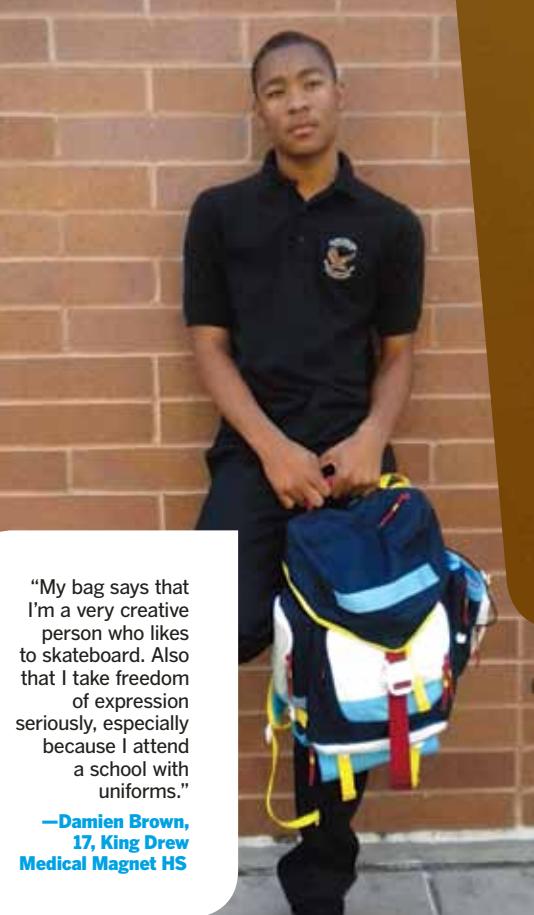
Carrying my personality

"I like being distinguished from a crowd and when you see my bag you are like 'Oh, he's dope.' I bought the backpack from Urban Outfitters but all the customization I did myself. The buttons a friend of mine made, the foxtail's name is Guillermo and the Lego heart brooch I made myself."

—Treyvon Washington, 16, King Drew Medical Magnet HS

"At my school, we wear uniforms and having a unique bag lets me show off my creative side. My backpack has a tons of buttons about things I strongly believe in like peace, Obama and animal rights. I want to send a message of my views wherever I go."

—Ashley Hansack, 17, King Drew Medical Magnet HS



"My bag says that I'm a very creative person who likes to skateboard. Also that I take freedom of expression seriously, especially because I attend a school with uniforms."

—Damien Brown, 17, King Drew Medical Magnet HS

Photos and interviews by Tracy Yao, 17, Covina HS; Ashley Hansack, 17, King Drew Medical Magnet HS; Luisa Mendoza, 17, Lynwood HS; Destiny Jackson, 17, Mayfair HS (Lakewood); Avika Dua, 15, Walnut HS

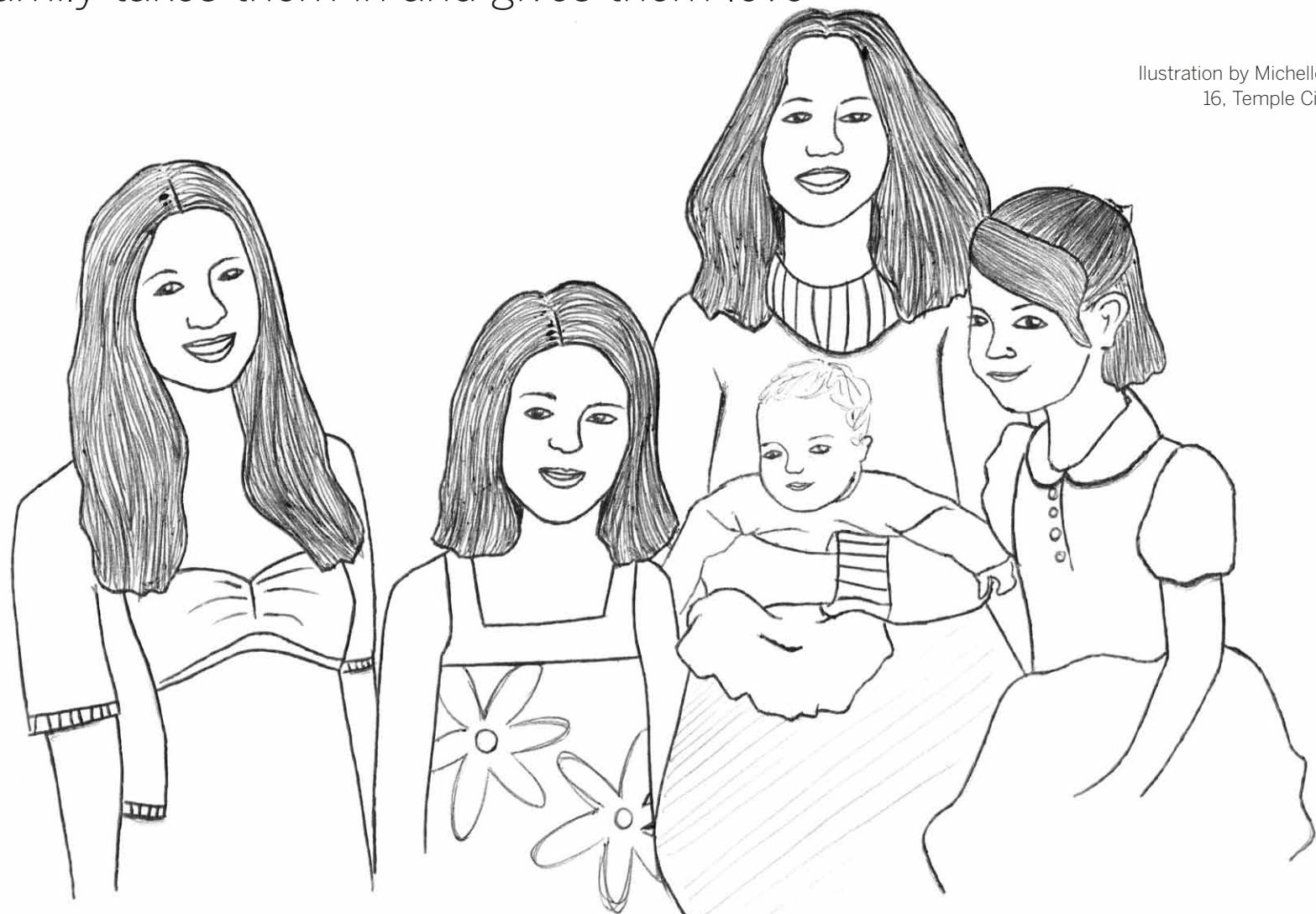


THESE TEENS EXPRESS WHO THEY ARE WITH THEIR BAGS

They're family, not foster kids

When babies can't live with their parents, my family takes them in and gives them love

Illustration by Michelle Cao,
16, Temple City HS



By Helen Santacruz
15, Bravo Medical Magnet HS

My youngest "sister" is just a baby. She wasn't even two weeks old when the social worker dropped her off. She was sleeping and wearing green pajamas. One day she could go home to her mother or will be put up for adoption. But for the next year we'll be her family.

My family started fostering children about two years ago. My mother would bring it up. "What do you think about fostering? Only the little ones though." I figured

she meant we'd get toddlers and it'd be like a day care. I thought it would be fun and that it would be nice to have more responsibility because I don't do much around the house.

I also wanted to foster because I thought we could help the kids. The court can take a child away from their parents if it's determined that the parents are unable to take care of the child because of drug use, abuse or neglect. I think these children should have a safe place to go to. I thought that if we took care of them, they would be OK.

Even though my mom came up with the idea, I had to convince her of all the good things we could do. "We

would really help mom!" She was hesitant but I was determined. "We could buy them clothes and food and toys with the money we get," I said, referring to the monthly payment we'd get for taking care of them. My mom said, "Fine, if you want to do it, you have to help me." I said, "I know." "You have to change diapers." I didn't want to do it, but I said fine. "You have to help me feed them and burp them, especially at night." "Fine," I said. I really wanted to foster kids and I was determined to help them. Finally, a few weeks later, my mother said yes.

A few days later she came home with a binder full

of information from the foster agency to share with me and my sisters, Beverly and Yoce. She would have to get a background check and take classes, one for CPR and another six-hour long seminar about taking care of a child.

WE GOT THE HOUSE READY FOR KIDS

We had to child-proof the house. This was the most tedious part. My mother gave us a list and pointed to a bag filled with electrical outlet blockers. She told my sisters to plug them into the outlets. I had to lock up the dangerous items, like knives, scissors and medicine, in a closet. It took two hours to move and organize everything. We also needed an emergency kit in case of a disaster and a separate room for the child.

We furnished our extra bedroom. We went to Walmart and bought a crib and mattress. We bought pajamas, beanies, mittens and socks. We tried getting both boy and girl colors, but my mother couldn't resist the pink sheets. Along with the sheets we bought a green highchair, a yellow blanket and diapers. I was excited and hoped we had bought everything we needed.

My mom got toy donations from work. There were dolls and books and a toy truck. We also bought this little green chalkboard sign to put on the child's door so my mother could write the name of the kid who was there. Inside the room, we put up an old Cinderella poster and pictures Yoce painted. I could picture a baby boy there. I saw him playing with the toy truck and sleeping on the pink sheets.

Finally, about two months after my mother applied to be a foster parent, a social worker came to make sure we had done all the necessary preparations. A few days later they called and told us we'd been approved to be a foster family. They said they'd call again when we'd get a baby. I was excited and relieved. We were finally done with everything.

I called my mom after school a week later to see if she was picking me up. She told me we got our first child. "OK! I'll be right there!" I said. I ran to where my mom's car was parked. I was wondering if it was a boy or girl, how old it was, how it looked. When I got there I saw a little boy sleeping in a car seat. "What's his name?" "Joseph," my mom said. He had funny ears that bent down at the top, a round head and was almost 2. I couldn't wait to play with him.

For the first few days, he just sat there and looked at us like "Who are you?" After about a week he would run up and down our living room, fall, get up and continue running. We had him for only about a month, and then he went to live with his grandmother.

OUR NEXT FOSTER CHILD WAS JUST A LITTLE BABY

About a week later, we got Asia. She was less than a month old. She had black curly hair and big brown eyes.

On weekends I took care of Asia at night and helped my mom during the day. I thought the night shift would be easy because I go to sleep late, around 11 p.m. We would put Asia in the cradle and she would sleep in my room. She would wake up about every three hours. Faintly hearing her cries, I'd haul myself out of bed, still in a zombie state as her cries got louder every second. I would make a bottle with formula and feed her while

sitting on my bed. After she finished the bottle, which took about half an hour, I would lay her on my chest and pat her back until she burped. Quickly, I'd change her diaper and wrap her up in a blanket like a burrito. I'd hold her until she fell asleep and put her in the cradle. Before I knew it, I was getting out of bed again to take care of her. I was dead tired in the morning but it faded as the day went on.

Thankfully, Asia's mom was able to get her daughter back six months later, after she did what the court told her to do. We still keep in touch. Sometimes my mom calls her mom and we visit. She even e-mailed us Christmas pictures! From what I've heard their family is doing great.

Last June, Andrey came to live with us. He was my favorite, partially because he stayed with us the longest, but also because he was the cutest. He was a 2-year-old with blueish hazel eyes, reddish-brown hair and an enormous appetite. Andrey could eat an entire In-n-Out burger.

On weekends I took care of Asia at night. We would put her in the cradle and she would sleep in my room. She would wake up every three hours. Faintly hearing her cries, I'd haul myself out of bed, still in a zombie state as her cries got louder.

We'd call him "the monster" because he ate so much.

He was funny. We all went for a walk one evening. The sun was low and out of nowhere Andrey began screaming, "AHH!" It was incredibly high pitched. We turned to look and he was pointing at his shadow! He started to run, looked back and screamed even more when he saw that this mysterious thing was following him. I ran after him, laughing.

When I first wanted us to be a foster family I mostly thought about how my day wouldn't be so dull. I didn't think about why the kids needed us. I was shocked when my mom told me the stories of why the kids were in foster care. They are so heartbreaking. Andrey's story was the saddest one. His father tried to commit suicide after his mother had died. Andrey was taken away from his father because the court said it wasn't safe for him. His dad was ordered to go to therapy and parenting classes. I expected the stories to be sad, but getting to know the children makes it more real.

When my mom broke her ankle while hiking, Andrey

had to be transferred to a different family because she couldn't take care of him. It kills me to say this, but I felt worse about losing Andrey than my mother breaking her ankle because I knew she would be fine. It was really hard not to cry when he left. He'd been with us for nine months.

Andrey left in February and we had about a four-month break from fostering while my mother recovered. When my mother got better we went to our foster agency's annual festival for the foster families and the foster kids. Hoping I'd see Andrey, my heart pounded as we arrived at the park. The agency told us Andrey would be there. We were all hoping to see our little "monster." When we did, he didn't remember us. He looked confused. I picked him up and Yoce said, "Look Andrey, it's Hellie!" He said, "Hellie," and there was a little more excitement in his eyes. We sat down and played. I stood him up on my lap and made him jump by lifting him in the air. It was a bad idea because he never lets you stop once you start playing. After 10 minutes my arms were aching and so I set Andrey on the ground. As he waddled away, I kept thinking, "I'll miss you," and hoped he would remember us. About four months later we got a call in June. Andrey's dad had gotten better and Andrey would be returning to him, where he belonged.

I KNOW IT'S BEST WHEN THEY RETURN TO THEIR FAMILIES

It's tough getting attached to the kids and then having to let them go. I am glad that they return to their families, but upset because we have to say goodbye. My mother always said it was better when the child was with their blood, their family. So when I get upset because each of them has to go I always hope that they will be better off with their families.

Evangelina lives with us now. She is a tiny 4-month-old baby. Her mother used drugs when she was pregnant and Evangelina tested positive for meth when she was born. Her mom has six months to a year to get off drugs and go to court-ordered counseling. Then the court will decide if she's fit to get Evangelina back.

Each foster child becomes part of our family, no matter how long we have them. We don't call them foster kids. When someone asks, my sisters and I refer to them as our brother or sister and mom calls them her child.

These children make every day more fulfilling. They are fun, but the responsibility needed to take care of them and be their family is more rewarding. I like to think my family and I are doing something important. We give them a place to stay and care for them like family. We love them. When they leave, I hope it's for the best. I hope they'll return to their family, loved and safe.



Helen is glad
Evangelina is finally
sleeping through the
night, which makes it
easier for her to do her
homework.

I thought I'd never play again

After years of severe back pain,
I finally get to play the sport I love

By Claudia Marin

17, Santa Monica HS

I've never been the smartest kid in school, but soccer was the one thing I was actually good at and enjoyed. I've played since I was 5. The more I played, the better I got, and the better I got the more I liked it. My weekends revolved around soccer games, tournaments, extra practices and watching games on TV with my dad. The dresser in my bedroom was covered with trophies and medals. I played about seven months a year in a recreation league, then joined a more competitive club soccer team when I was 13. I met many of my closest friends through soccer, including my best friend.

I loved it so much, that's why I played for years even though I was in pain. I was 7 years old when I first felt pain in my lower back. My doctor said that I had a mild case of scoliosis and told me to rest. For about a month and a half I stopped playing soccer and my back felt better. But when I started playing again, the pain came back.

Over the years I saw several doctors about my back including my primary doctor, orthopedic specialists (who specialize in fixing bone and joint problems), a pain management specialist, physical therapists, an acupuncturist and chiropractors. Nothing they prescribed or suggested made me feel better.

At first it hurt only when I played, but when I was about 13, it started hurting off the field too. I'd tell the doctors how much pain I was in, and they'd tell me to rest for a couple of months, ice and heat it, do physical therapy, take anti-inflammatory meds and be patient. But all of those suggestions only brought short-term relief. I thought I'd never get better.

Some days it was excruciating just to walk. But I kept playing through it. When I was 13 an orthopedic doctor told me, "The only way you're going to feel better is if you don't play at all." I'd never considered not playing, but I listened and took a three-week break.

I DREAMED OF PLAYING IN COLLEGE

After the break I felt well enough to play again and started playing for a club soccer team on a full scholarship. The coach at the high school where we practiced, who often watched our practices, tried to recruit me to go to his high school. It made me feel like I had a real shot at being good enough to play in college. My family was struggling to pay for my brother to go to college.

I didn't want my parents to have to struggle the same way with me. I really wanted soccer to take me to college on a scholarship.

The next fall I tried out for my high school soccer team and was one of two freshmen to make varsity. That season the pain was tolerable. I played harder than ever before; I went after every ball even if it meant getting knocked down as a result. I was proud of myself. I earned a starting spot on the team and we went undefeated in league and made it to the semi-finals of post-season play.

However, a month after the season ended the pain got worse. Some days I'd lie in bed for a half hour before feeling able to sit up and walk around. Many of those mornings I'd lie in the tub to soak in hot water for about 45 minutes before feeling able to go to school, and even then the only way I'd get through the day was with a tight elastic wrap and a heating pad wrapped around

my teachers and my counselor decided that home instruction was the best option for me. So, I had a teacher assigned to me who came to my home once or twice a week to explain my assignments. I did home instruction for the rest of the year. I had to drop chemistry because I couldn't go to school to complete the labs. I also dropped algebra 2 because most days I had to learn from the book, which was really overwhelming. I often felt like I didn't have enough time for my schoolwork because I wasn't always physically able to sit at a desk or was asleep because of the pain medication I was on.

MY SPINE WAS CRACKED IN TWO PLACES

In January 2009 my doctor sent me to yet another specialist. During the appointment with the new spine specialist he showed me my CT scan on the computer. The CT scan images looked like an x-ray, with white bone on a black background. I saw cracks on both sides of my vertebra. It looked like three separate bones where there should have been one. He said it was spondylosis, a condition that caused fractures in the vertebra, and a pinched nerve, which caused my pain.

I couldn't believe I had broken my spine. He was surprised that I had been playing soccer because the fracture had been there for at least a few years. He told me that I might not have hurt it so badly if I weren't an athlete, but it probably would've happened eventually, so I didn't regret playing through the pain for so long. I just wanted to get better.

The doctor said the fracture might heal itself. I'd have to wear a body brace 23 hours a day for three months, to allow the bones to heal. He showed me a picture of the brace—it looked like a cast around my

One day the pain in my back got so bad I couldn't walk. I froze up and a sharp excruciating pain shot down my left leg. It was the most intolerable pain I had ever experienced. I cried for two hours. Not even the medication my doctor prescribed made me feel better.

my back. I didn't make it on time to first period English most mornings. I missed so much school I got an "incomplete" for the second semester of English. This meant I'd have to re-take an entire semester of freshman English during my sophomore year. I was really disappointed.

One day in October 2008, a month into my sophomore year, the pain in my back got so bad I couldn't walk. I froze up, and a sharp excruciating pain shot down my left leg. It was the worst, most intolerable pain I had ever experienced. I cried for two hours. Not even the pain medication my doctor had prescribed made me feel better.

My mom called my doctor and he referred me to an orthopedic spine specialist. The specialist prescribed more medication, which didn't help.

I was in bed all day for two weeks, in too much pain to even walk. I got so behind on my schoolwork that

torso connected by a metal rod to a cast around my left thigh that didn't allow bending at the waist. I started crying. I imagined myself being stuck at home all day, missing school, missing soccer and missing the way things used to be.

I had to quit soccer. It was such a big part of my life—the thing I was best at. I was so used to practicing and playing all the time that I didn't know what to do with myself. I felt like a part of me was missing. And I had to come to terms with the fact that I wasn't going to play soccer in college and maybe ever again.

In May my three months of being in a brace were over. A new CT scan showed my back hadn't healed; it was a waste of time. My spine specialist told me my only options were surgery to fuse the cracks and implant metal screws in my vertebra, or live with the pain. My parents and I had a long talk about my options.

Claudia practices for her high school soccer team, which she's playing on for the first time since her freshman year.

Photo by Jasper Nahid, 16,
Hamilton HS



We had heard about rare cases where complications during surgery have led to paralysis. I was afraid but I wasn't going to just sit there and do nothing about it. I felt like surgery was my only shot at getting better, so we scheduled it for June.

In September I went back to school though I was nowhere near completely healed. The mornings were the worst. It was hard to get out of bed because my back was really stiff and sore from the walking I had done at school the day before. My brother said I looked like a pregnant lady gripping my back, legs spread out and my feet hardly coming off the ground as I walked. I wore sandals or Uggs because I couldn't bend over to tie shoelaces. Walking from class to class carrying my backpack was extremely difficult. My mom would pick me up from school because walking 10 blocks home was too much for me. I cried often and told my mom,

"It didn't change anything."

At a check-up in January my surgeon told me that I could consider playing soccer because my back looked strong enough. I was surprised because I was still in pain. Plus, I hadn't played soccer in almost two years. Part of me didn't want to play again. I was frustrated and it was easier to move on than to keep wishing things would get better. I didn't want to risk hurting my back again, but I didn't want to look back and think, "Man, I wish I had given it a shot."

I spoke to the coach. I told him I wanted to play next school year. He told me that he was happy for me and that he'd be glad to have me on the team. He told me that he had no expectations and that he didn't care whether I could play five minutes or the entire game. I was glad and felt relieved because I wasn't sure how good I would be anyway.

One day in March my mom picked me up from school and asked, "How's your back?" I told her, "I haven't thought about it all day." I was so surprised. It didn't hurt, so I started running and biking to get back in shape.

I WAS A LITTLE RUSTY BUT GLAD TO BE BACK

My first practice was in June, well before the season started. It wasn't anything serious. Our first game wouldn't be until mid-November, but I wanted to start preparing as early as I could. I hadn't kicked a ball in two years and I was terrible. We were doing a passing drill and every time I kicked the ball it wouldn't get very far. My partner would laugh and I'd laugh too. I remember her saying, "No, no, no, move your foot this way," jokingly showing me how to kick the ball. Because my teammates laughed with me and helped me, I knew they were there to support me.

I practiced with the team three days a week over the summer. I'm not at the level I was before, but I feel more confident and I'm not as hard on myself. It feels good to play again, even though sometimes I get frustrated with myself because my body moves differently than before and sometimes I'm still sore.

I know it's going to take some time. I don't need to be the best; I just want to be someone my teammates can count on. I'm grateful to be part of my team again. I still love soccer—it's just not as big a part of my life as it used to be. School and getting into college are my priority, but soccer will always be my passion.



Claudia is looking forward to playing soccer this season. She says there's no pressure, just fun.

L.A.youth

ART CONTEST: Create a new state flag



IMAGE BY FLAGS-TO-PRINT.COM

DEADLINE: MARCH 31, 2011

The California flag has a bear and star on it with the words "California Republic." It was created almost 100 years ago and we don't see too many bears anymore (thankfully!). We want you to create your own state flag to show what California means to you. There's a lot to appreciate. We have beaches, mountains and famous landmarks. There are so many things that make the state unique and everyone has different things they love about it. Enter our art contest and design a state flag that shows us your view of California.

1ST PLACE
\$75
2ND & 3RD PLACE
\$50

RULES

- 1) Contest entries must be original artwork of Los Angeles County youth ages 13 to 19.
- 2) The work may be done in any medium, including acrylics, oils, charcoal, pencil, pen, watercolor, collage, multimedia, photography or sculpture. The dimensions should be 8 1/2" by 11". Three-dimensional artwork should include a photograph of the artwork.
- 3) Each artist may submit only one entry.
- 4) The artist's name, age, address and phone number should be included on the back of the artwork. If the artist is in school, the school's name should be included. If the artwork was created as an assigned project in a classroom, the teacher's name should be listed. Artwork will be returned if a return address is provided.

The teen staff of L.A. Youth will select a first-, second- and third-place winner as well as some honorable mentions. The first-place winner and his or her teacher will each receive \$75. Second- and third-place winning students and teachers will each receive \$50. Winners and honorable mentions will be published in the May-June 2011 issue of L.A. Youth and on layouth.com.

Questions?

Contact us at (323) 938-9194 or editor@layouth.com.

Send your submission to:

L.A. Youth
5967 W. Third St., Suite 301
Los Angeles, CA 90036

Give museums a chance

Art isn't just nice to look at, it can also be thought provoking

By Christian Santiago

17, University HS

Last year I went to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to see an exhibit of ancient Roman art. I like Roman art because the marble statues are elegant and they're all handcrafted. The gown carved on the Aphrodite statue looked wavy and silky, as if it was fabric put on top of her. I wondered how they cut it so perfectly. How long did it take to make the statue? How many people were needed? Seeing something so old right in front of me, I was art struck!

Before high school I wasn't into art. I thought museums were boring. The art looked nice but I never understood it. In eighth grade we went to the Getty museum. There was a really strange painting in this French exhibit. It was of women in a garden at some tea party. They were wearing big hats and those dresses that puff out. I thought, "Why did people wear that? Why were the dresses so huge?" I didn't have fun until we left for lunch.

But in ninth grade I took a photography class. I really liked being in the darkroom printing photos so I signed up for AP photo in 10th grade. We learned about artwork and went on several field trips to museums.

HOW WAS THIS ART?

We went on a class trip to the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA). The teacher had us look at a piece of art that was just a framed ticket. It looked like an old train ticket. It had numbers on it. My classmates said, "What's so great about this?" and "I could have made this myself." After the class, I questioned it a lot. I wanted to know more about what the artist was thinking when he or she produced it. Why was this ticket an art piece to them? Where'd the ticket come from? What did they



Christian says to go to a museum because you'll probably learn something new.



Christian saw the Roman statue Aphrodite and Jeff Koons' Balloon Dog at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Images courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

think was so special about it that people could relate to? When people say, "I could make that myself" my response is, "Why didn't you think of it first?"

After that, I liked looking at art. I'd take time looking at each piece, thinking more about it. If I really like it, I'll look at it for a minute or two, like when I saw Andy Warhol's Kellogg's Corn Flakes Boxes at LACMA. I liked the way the oversized boxes were stacked and the whole time I was thinking, "Why would he have it stacked like that?" There are a lot of things that Americans consume and are just as well known, so why Corn Flakes? I realized it wasn't the actual product. People don't consume boxes, they consume the food in them. Why was he depicting just the box and not the food in it?

In AP art history in 11th grade, I learned not to be so literal when I look at an art piece. Our teacher showed us an image of this ugly stone doll called Venus of Willendorf. It had a disproportional body with small arms and a huge torso and her legs looked like two hot dog buns. It was really weird. At first I thought, "Was this what a woman's body looked like back then?" Then she showed us an art piece with an evil lady with snakes in her head and a narrow waist. We had to compare them. I realized it was the artists' own interpretations of the woman's anatomy.

After that when I saw art, I tried to figure out what the artist was saying and then came up with my own opinion. There's no right or wrong answer. That made it more fun. In 11th grade we went on a field trip to

LACMA. There was a huge balloon dog sculpture by Jeff Koons. It brought back childhood memories of when I had clowns make a dog or a sword for me at birthday parties and carnivals. I think his intention was to get people to think about their childhoods.

THE OLDER PIECES TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT THEIR TIME

I like going to museums. It's neat to see artwork from different countries and artists. It's cool to look at the old stuff. There must have been a reason why it was preserved, even though it's hundreds of years old. People wanted to save it because it was important for that period of time.

Art museums aren't just sculptures or paintings. One of my favorite exhibits was the Vanity Fair covers at LACMA. Vanity Fair is a prestigious magazine and it has the best photographers. I liked the exhibit because they had covers from when the magazine started until now so I saw how they'd changed. The first issues were 10 cents and the recent ones are \$4. In the 50s the photos were natural but all the new ones are retouched to fit the idea of perfection. I realized that society has evolved with modern technology. You don't see any natural photographs now.

Museums are pretty cheap for students (just \$5 at MOCA) and there are free days too. Hopefully you'll want to go to an art museum and get something out of it like I did, which is a different way of looking at life.

North Koreans shouldn't have to suffer

When I learned about refugees who risked their lives to escape, I wished I could help them

By Ha Young Kwen
16, Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights)

Earlier this year, I saw a documentary about North Korea at my church. One scene showed North Korean boys scrounging for food in the mud with no shoes on. The movie explained that there's a famine in North Korea. But what makes it worse is that the country's leader, Kim Jong-il, gives his supporters and soldiers food while leaving millions hungry.

I was born in South Korea, which borders North Korea. North Koreans have the same hopes, dreams and fears as we do, but don't have the same opportunities. I think of them as my brothers and sisters. It hurts to think that my people are dying because they don't have enough food to eat.

I learned that North Korea is a dictatorship and the government holds absolute control over people's lives. North Koreans don't have freedom of speech, press or religion. People are sent to prison camps for the smallest reasons, like listening to a foreign radio station. No one can leave or enter the country.

However, those who are desperate for food and freedom risk their lives to leave. To escape North Korea, the only option is to swim across one of its rivers into China. North Korean soldiers patrol the rivers and if the soldiers see anyone trying to escape, they shoot them. In one scene from the documentary, a riverbank was lined with dead bodies, which reminded me of pictures I've seen in books about the Holocaust. Once in China, North Korean refugees have to hide from Chinese officials. If they're caught,



Ha Young is excited to host a screening at her school so more people can learn about what North Korean refugees have to go through.



A woman is stopped by Chinese guards as she tries to get into the Japanese consulate in China. Refugees are sent back to North Korea if they are caught by Chinese authorities.

Photos courtesy of Incite Productions

China sends them back to North Korea, where they could be tortured, sent to a prison camp or executed.

The film was about refugees hiding in China. They were trying to find safety, but most of them got sent back.

I UNDERSTOOD THEIR FEAR

I felt a bond with the refugees. There was a scene that showed refugees hiding in a safehouse in China. This reminded me of when I went to a secret shelter with my mom and brother to get away from my abusive dad eight years ago. I know what it feels like to live in fear and uncertainty. Whenever I went to school, I worried my dad would find me to get to my mom. I didn't know where we would live after the shelter and how we could

afford to rent an apartment if my mom couldn't get a job. About a month after being in the shelter, my mom got a job and we moved into a small apartment. I cried watching the refugees go through a more difficult situation. I knew I had to help in some way.

After the film, a speaker from LiNK (Liberty in North Korea), an organization that raises awareness about the North Korean crisis, asked us to support their cause by buying a DVD of Seoul Train (Seoul is the capital of South Korea), the movie we had just watched. I bought the DVD to show my friends so they could share my passion to end this crisis. At school, I let my friend borrow the DVD, but he left it in his locker for a few weeks and never watched it. I felt discouraged.

But a few weeks later, I was given an opportunity to show Seoul Train. I had a substitute teacher for Spanish class. At the end of each week, the substitute allowed students to bring in movies to learn about other cultures. I asked the teacher if I could share Seoul Train with the class. The teacher was reluctant at first because she worried that a documentary would bore the students but she later agreed.

WOULD MY CLASSMATES CARE?

I was anxious about how my classmates would react to the documentary. Would they find it boring or would they be shocked just as I was?

In one scene, a family of North Korean refugees in China attempted to get into the Japanese consulate (an office of the Japanese government) with hopes of receiving help. The refugees needed to run past the gate without being captured by Chinese policemen who guarded the entrance. The husband and uncle were supposed to stall the police so the wife, little girl and grandmother could get in first. But the men ran in first—maybe because they were nervous—and the women and child were caught by the police.

My classmates watched silently as the women screamed hysterically. I could feel the tension and shock in the room. A friend of mine had her eyes open wide in disbelief and covered her mouth with both hands. Afterward, a friend came up to me and asked, "Is this happening right now?" I told her yes.

If kids in my Spanish class didn't know about this crisis, there are others who don't know about it either. We never see media coverage of humanitarian problems in North Korea. On the news, reporters talk about North Korea testing nuclear missiles. Because of that, many people assume all North Koreans are trying to nuke the United States. It is the government that makes those threats, not the millions who suffer under its control.

I want to tell others about this crisis. I started a LiNK club at school to raise money and awareness for the North Korean refugees who have gone unnoticed for too long.

To read Ha Young's interview with Joseph, who escaped North Korea when he was 15, go to lAYOUTH.com

By Hanifati Mokhammad
16, Pacific Coast HS

I have a rare disease. It has no cure and I have to take medicine every day so I don't get sick. If I didn't take my medication for months I would get weak and it could even be deadly. But I don't think about that. I just think that if I take my medicine I'll live until I'm 100. I'm not going to let it stop me.

I was born with a cleft lip, like the children in the commercials on TV. They placed me in an incubator for a week and when they took me out, my doctor discovered that my temperature was below normal. My doctor scanned my brain using an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging). He found out that I don't have a pituitary gland, which is a part of the brain that produces hormones that regulate growth, temperature and stress. He diagnosed me with hypopituitarism (it's pronounced high-po-pit-u-it-ir-ism). My doctors don't know why I have it.

From that day on I've had to take medication to give me the hormones I'm missing. The doctors told my parents they had to give me growth hormone shots every day to help me grow. The shot did what my body was supposed to do. (They gave me the shots every night until middle school, when the doctors said my height was normal). Four months later I had surgery to fix my cleft lip. I have other health problems too, like asthma. I use an inhaler when I have trouble breathing.

I'm about 5'1. Without growth hormones, I'd be even shorter. When people ask how old I am and I tell them I'm 16, they say "Are you serious?" They think I'm 10 or 11.

I also get sick a lot. For most people, when they get sick their bodies produce more hormones to help them get better. If I get sick, my body doesn't produce enough hormones and I get really sick. Like when I get a cold I sometimes have an asthma attack, and that causes me to get pneumonia.

AS A KID, I WAS HOSPITALIZED A LOT

In elementary school I got sick every year. I ended up in the hospital because of pneumonia, asthma attacks, high fevers and even seizures. I didn't like the hospital because my parents and brother weren't there. The only time I had fun was when I was in third or fourth grade and the last day I was there was my birthday. My mom brought a cake and wanted to light the candles, but my brother shouted, "This is a hospital!" He knew that the room could blow up since I was breathing oxygen from a tank. I was stuck in the bed full of tubes and couldn't leave. I joked, "Are you trying to kill me?"

By middle school I was a bit healthier since I was growing up, so I wasn't going to the hospital as much.

My disease doesn't hold me back



I've had health problems all my life, but I'm still doing the things I want to do



Hani wants to continue writing.

Once a month I'd get a fever, cold or headaches.

I sometimes wanted to pretend like I didn't have an illness. I got a little rebellious and I'd skip my medications a few times a week. I knew I could get sick but I was tired of taking them. My cousin, who lived in my house at the time, caught me throwing my meds away. He tattled to my mom and my mom was mad. She told me that I had to take my medicine every day. I did but sometimes I forgot to take them when I woke up late for school.

My mom was worried that I wasn't taking my medicines, so when I was 14 the doctors suggested I see a psychologist. I didn't like her. All she did was ask stupid questions. "Are you lonely?" "Of course I'm not." Her other questions were weirder. "Do you ever feel like killing yourself?" She thought I was a loner who wanted to kill myself. I thought, "I want to make it to 100, so I can see all my grandchildren." I begged my mom, "Can we quit? She's a crazy lady." After the second visit she let me stop seeing the psychologist. My mom knew that I would never commit suicide. She said, "If you promise to take your medicines you don't have to go."

MY FRIENDS MAKE ME HAPPY

I don't feel lonely because I have friends who care about me. My friends like me as me, not as a sick pitiable person. It's important to me that they don't see me as someone sick, because I'm still strong. I don't want them to worry about me or treat me differently.

I met Salma through my mom when I was in elementary school. She's younger than me but we still have fun. I play with her and her younger sisters. We talk and play board games or go to the park.

My friendship with Sarah is very special. She's my age. We met in the bathroom of our mosque in Hawthorne when I was 8. She's outgoing and likes to ask lots of questions. I talk to her on Facebook because we now live far away from each other. Most of our conversations are silly. She asks me if I like anyone. "Hush up will you? I like no boy. BLEH."

Sometimes it's hard having a disease. I wish I didn't have to take my medications. But I know I have to because they keep me healthy. I don't like going to the doctors. So many tests. They overreact to everything! But I'm used to it.

My one and only cure is to be myself and have fun. I like writing stories and having sleepovers with my friends and cousins. We talk and sometimes we tell scary stories. That's why I don't care much about having a disease, because I still can have fun.

There are a lot of people who have a disease who do great things and I want to try to achieve the things I want to do. I want to write stories, become an author and an ESL teacher so I can travel the world. I can do anything I want to do.

ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

The silliest thing I've done for love

1ST PLACE \$50

I wrote a love letter every day

Author's name withheld

What silly thing did I do for a guy? Well, here's some background info: I was in eighth grade, he was in ninth grade. He lived in Cerritos and I lived in L.A. We only saw each other once or twice (at most) a week. I'm not really sure what made me like him but he was so kind and sweet.

It was Christmas 2007 and he had just broken up with his girlfriend. Knowing about the stuff he went through, I gave him lots of comfort and support. Thanks to that, we became a lot closer and he ended up asking me out on Christmas Eve. (Is that romantic or what?)

OK, so I'll get to the point. Starting from the first day we were going out, I wrote a letter to him every day so that when it came to our 100th day, he would receive 100 letters. And this wasn't just any type of letter. I put so much thought and effort into it. I would write about how much I thought of him that day, how much I missed him, and all the reasons why I liked him so much. I know, it sounds pretty creepy (and corny), but at that time I spent one to two hours writing each day. So much effort was put in; each letter even had its own envelope.

So did it work? Ha ha ... it makes me laugh when I think about it. Let's just say, he started to lose feelings for me. It turned out that I was a rebound for him after he broke up with his girlfriend. I'm not bitter toward him today (although I was for a year afterward). I un-



Illustration by Sam Landsberg, 17, Hamilton HS

derstand that he needed someone to help him get over his ex-girlfriend. However, I don't recommend seeking another person to fulfill your needs right after going through a breakup because you will really hurt the other person. To be honest, I was truly heartbroken. I never experienced so much loneliness in my life before this happened.

Oh yeah, about the letters ... What did I do with them? What should I have done with them? I thought of throwing them away, shredding them, even burning them. But that would be a lot of papers wasted. So I decided to give them to him anyway—those pitiful 70 pages (I wrote more than one page for each day) with my scrawly handwriting that I thought he'd be able

to read. His reaction? "You didn't have to give them to me." At that time, I couldn't believe his words. All my hard work and he thought it was useless. But his sister told me later that he read every single one of them and still has them today.

Did it work out? Not quite the way I wanted it to. Did I regret it? Yes and no. I regret that I did this special thing for him and not for my future husband. I don't regret it because it taught me how to write even more meaningful letters to the people who helped me get back on my feet again. One more thing for those who may have been wondering: being asked out on Christmas Eve isn't as great and romantic as you think it would be. Good luck everyone!

I would write about how much I thought of him that day, how much I missed him, and all the reasons why I liked him so much. I know, it sounds pretty creepy (and corny), but at that time I spent one to two hours writing each day.

2ND PLACE \$30

I got the girl by dating her friend

By Grigor Emiryan

Amelia Earhart HS (North Hollywood)

The silliest thing I've done for love is a long story.

There was this girl named Mary. She was really cute and real cool. We were friends, but I didn't know if she liked me back.

One day I thought of an idea: if I went out with her friend, she would feel jealous and go out with me. So I started going out with her friend Marina. I noticed it was working. One day Mary wrote to me on Facebook and we talked. She told me that Marina had said how great I was and she wrote how lucky Marina was to be with me. I knew my plan was working.

Finally, I decided to make it happen. I called Mary and told her that I liked her and the only reason I went out with Marina was so she would become jealous. She told me that was the sweetest thing ever and she became my girlfriend!

(P.S. L.A. Youth spoke to Grigor after he won and found out that he and his girlfriend have been together for three and a half years.)

3RD PLACE \$20

I shouted out my feelings

By Emanuel Castro

Birmingham Community Charter HS

I've done some crazy things to let a person know how I feel. It was the first day of school in eighth grade and everyone was happy to see their friends and what classes they had. When I got to fifth period algebra I sat in my assigned seat and I noticed a girl sitting next to me. When I saw her I thought she was really pretty. I told myself I should get to know her. In sixth period we both ended up being teacher's assistants for P.E.

A couple days went by and on Sept. 5, 2009 we finally talked. Her name was Nadya. We shared my algebra book and always did our classwork together. We became best friends and told each other a lot of stuff. We even came up with our own words. As months went by our relationship grew. We would walk to class together, sit next to each other and I even

started to hang out with her after school.

I knew I really liked her. No, I knew I loved her, and I wanted to be with her! The only think that was stopping us was another girl. I told Nadya I wanted to be with her and that I would break up with the other girl for her, but she started acting weird. We weren't talking as much, but I would still bring her flowers and write her notes saying I loved her and that we were going to go out in high school.

Nadya would always deny that I loved her so I decided to prove her wrong. "I love Nadya!" I said out loud at lunch in front of everyone. The other girl broke up with me. I didn't care. I wanted to show the girl who I really wanted to be with how I felt in front of everyone so she would believe me. After lunch everyone said I should feel embarrassed and stupid for doing something so dumb, but I didn't care. I wanted to prove a point and the only thing that mattered to me was Nadya and if she believed me and felt the same way I did.

The next day she told me to stop talking to her because she had a boyfriend. I felt stupid for doing what I did. Not until then did I feel embarrassed. I did something so silly for her love that I never got.

NEW ESSAY CONTEST

What brightens your day?

What is something that makes your day a little better? It might help you forget whatever is stressing you out, or just makes you happy.

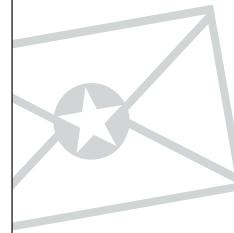
It could be your dog greeting you when you get home from school, going to swim practice or putting on a necklace that someone gave you and remembering how much they mean to you. Tell us why it makes you happy.

WIN
\$50

Write an essay to L.A. Youth and tell us about it:

Essays should be a page or more. Include your name, school, age and phone number with your essay. The staff of L.A. Youth will read the entries and pick three winners.

Your name will be withheld if you request it. The first-place winner will receive \$50. The second-place winner will get \$30 and the third-place winner will receive \$20. Winning essays will be printed in our January-February issue and put on our website at www.layouth.com.



Mail your essay to:

L.A. Youth
5967 W. 3rd St. Suite 301
Los Angeles CA 90036
or to editor@layouth.com

DEADLINE:
Friday, Dec. 17, 2010

The House at Riverton

By Kate Morton

Reviewed by Tracy Yao

17, Covina HS

When I saw a mysterious gold stairway on the cover of *The House at Riverton* by Kate Morton, I liked it so much that I immediately decided to read the first few pages of the book. The book starts with the main character, Grace Bradley, having a nightmare in which she sees a girl named Hannah who tells her "You're too late." In Grace's hands was a dead foxhound. I was hooked. I wanted to know more.

The House at Riverton was different than the books I usually read because it takes place in Great Britain during World War I, and I usually read books that take place in current times. But I liked how Morton developed the suspense and created the characters.

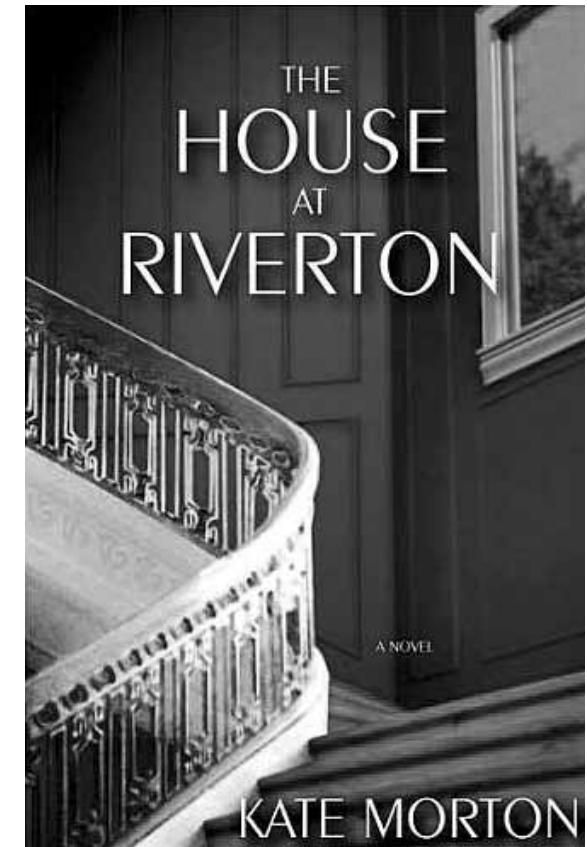
Grace was 14 when she was sent to the Ashbury family to work as a servant. Her family was poor, and she needed the money to support her mother. The Ashburys were a well-respected family and very wealthy. Grace meets Hannah and Emmeline, daughters of the household, along with David, the

oldest brother. Grace becomes friends with Hannah, who is the same age. The story bounces between the past and the present when Grace is 98 years old and living in a nursing home. When a director visits Grace and tells her that she would like to make a movie about Riverton's past, Grace starts to remember the things that happened during her time spent there.

My favorite part of the book is the mystery that revolves around how David's friend Robbie Hunter dies. He commits suicide but not everything is as it seems. It was really interesting how he started out as a minor character when he was first introduced as a friend, but then turns into a main character in Hannah's and Grace's lives. I felt excited learning about the events that lead up the suicide and I kept reading to find out the truth.

I loved the relationship that develops between Grace and Hannah, which showed that people of different social classes can get along. At the time, there was a huge gap between the rich and the poor. Their friendship was unique because even though Grace is a maid, Hannah slowly trusts her more and more. Grace would constantly help Hannah even if what Hannah was doing was wrong.

Though Grace and I are in different time periods, it was easy for me to connect with her as someone who wants to understand why there are limitations in society and wants to get to know people who live in different worlds. I would recommend this book even though the ending did make me cry a little.



The Hunger Games

By Suzanne Collins

Reviewed by Aaron Schwartz

15, Gabrielino HS (San Gabriel)

Imagine being suddenly taken away from your family by an oppressive government and being thrown into an area with 23 other people to fight to the death in an event televised by the government as entertainment. That is basically *The Hunger Games* in a nutshell. Written by Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* follows 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen as she fights for her life.

The book is based in the near future. A powerful city, the Capitol, controls 12 districts of slaves. The districts rebelled against the Capitol in the past and were brutally defeated. As punishment, the Capitol created the Hunger Games, where each district picks two teenagers, via lottery, and sends them to fight to the death for the Capitol's enjoyment. Katniss's younger sister Prim is chosen and Katniss volunteers to take her place.

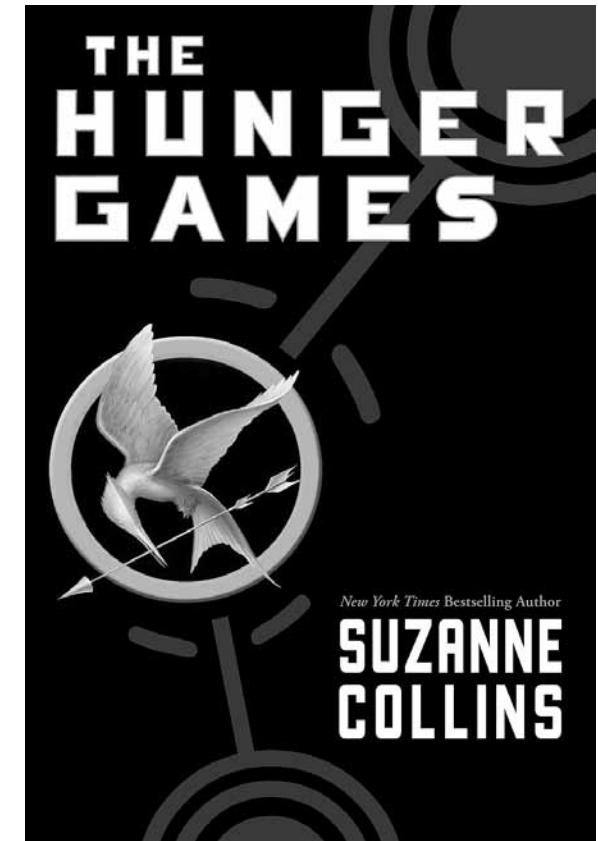
It is the plot that really sets the story apart from anything I've read. As soon as I thought I knew what was going on, something would happen that would

blow my mind. The treachery, alliances, friendships and gruesome battles make *The Hunger Games* exciting to read.

One particularly intense action scene is when Katniss is trapped in a tree by five enemies. She manages to escape only by throwing a nest of poisonous bees at them. Although she manages to wound or kill her pursuers, she gets stung multiple times as well. While hallucinating because of the poison, she struggles to steal a bow and get to safety before she is knocked unconscious by the poison.

I thought *The Hunger Games* was a great book. Once I started reading, I didn't put it down until I finished three hours later. Full of action, some romance and tragedy, it will keep anyone enthralled until the final page. Underneath all of the nonstop action, *The Hunger Games* poses serious questions about morality, poverty and death.

I would definitely recommend *The Hunger Games* and its sequels, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*.





3OH!3

CD: Want

Reviewed by Shivani Patel

14, Whitney HS (Cerritos)

You might recognize, "Shush girl, shut your lips/ Do the Helen Keller and talk with your hips" from a couple years ago. They're lyrics from "Don't Trust Me," one of the songs on 3OH!3's album Want. Although it's been out for a while, it's a really fun and upbeat song and it never gets old to me.

Most of the songs on Want are carefree and easy to dance to. "Don't Trust Me" was the biggest hit on the album. It's an incredibly silly song. The lyrics don't make a lot of sense, but the electronic rock beat makes up for it.

Another peppy song is "Starstruck." Like "Don't Trust Me," the lyrics are silly, but catchy at the same time. I don't agree with the lyrics because they're about how to take advantage of a girl without getting in trouble. However, I don't think it's meant to be taken seriously. It's another great one to dance to.

While most of the songs on Want are upbeat, "Still Around" stands out because it's more mellow and serious. "But that won't stop this drinking/ It's the least I can do/ Cause this life is anything but certain/ When they close the final curtain/ You'll get a glimpse of the truth." I think it's one of the best songs on the album.

If you're looking for songs that'll make you smile and dance, I'd recommend listening to this album.

"Don't Trust Me" was the biggest hit on the album. The lyrics don't make a lot of sense, but the electronic rock beat makes up for it.



Demon Hunter

CD: The World Is a Thorn

Reviewed by Austin LaCroix

15, Eagle Academy

Demon Hunter's previous record, *Storm the Gates of Hell*, was so brilliant I didn't think the metalcore band could top it. And then when I heard both guitarists left the band, I expected to be disappointed by Demon Hunter's latest record.

But with *The World Is a Thorn*, Demon Hunter has created another powerhouse metal album. Unlike the band's previous albums that have an overly melodic, rock-like feel, this album is more thrash with its reliance on thundering double-bass rhythms and screaming guitars (from newcomer Patrick Judge), while maintaining Ryan Clark's dark writing style.

My favorite song is "Tie This Around Your Neck." The chemistry between the drumming and guitar work makes for a heavy, mosh-pit-starting, head-banging sound that is matched by even heavier lyrics about the apathy and hate in our world. "You can feel the bones shatter beneath our feet/ The blood of lust staining our teeth."

I also like the ballad "Driving Nails." Unlike the power-pop melodies of ballads on previous albums, "Driving Nails" has a moody and somber tone melded closely with Clark's deep voice. The song uses synthesizers and strings to create an enveloping sound that carried me away in its elegance.

Other note-worthy tracks include the gritty rock song, "Collapsing," and the title track, a sledgehammer adrenaline boost midway through the album.

Even with the lineup change, Demon Hunter has continued expanding its sound, blasting away my doubts in the sonic onslaught of *The World Is a Thorn*.

Demon Hunter has created another powerhouse metal album.



Neon Trees

CD: Habits

Reviewed by Avika Dua

15, Walnut HS

I first heard a song by the rock group Neon Trees while browsing at Hollister in August. When I got home, I found myself humming the song's catchy tune. I searched for the lyric, "Say goodbye to my heart tonight," online and the first result that came up said it was from the song "Animal" from the Neon Trees' album *Habits*. I had never heard of the band, so I typed the song title into YouTube. It took only a little bit of time with the song on repeat to learn the lyrics word for word.

The contagious beat and memorable lyrics make "Animal" the ideal listen—whether I am angry, upset, or confused, listening to this song is the perfect remedy. The upbeat sound and lead singer Tyler Glenn's voice lift my spirits. In the chorus he sings, "Oh, oh/ I want some more/ Oh, oh/ What are you waitin' for/ Say goodbye to my heart tonight."

After listening to "Animal" I downloaded the entire album from iTunes that day. One song I identified with was "Love and Affection." "I just don't understand/ Why my love isn't good enough for you/ I want you to show me/ Love and affection, love and affection" are just some of the relatable lyrics. I can relate to being rejected, and this song helps me deal with these feelings.

Another one of my favorite songs on the album is "Sins of My Youth." I can't help but bob my head whenever I listen to it.

All the songs on *Habits* are catchy and will get stuck in your head. Neon Trees can rightly be dubbed the next rock sensation.

The contagious beat and memorable lyrics make "Animal" the ideal listen.

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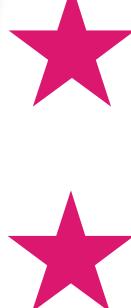
**Editor Laura Lee (left) works with Tiffany on her story.
At left are some of the foster youth stories we've published.**



Contact Editor Amanda Riddle at

(323) 938-9194
or ariddle@layouth.com

Invite Amanda to speak at your school, group home or foster agency about writing for L.A. Youth.



Got questions?

Go to layouth.com and click on the Foster Youth link to learn more and read stories written by foster youth.